

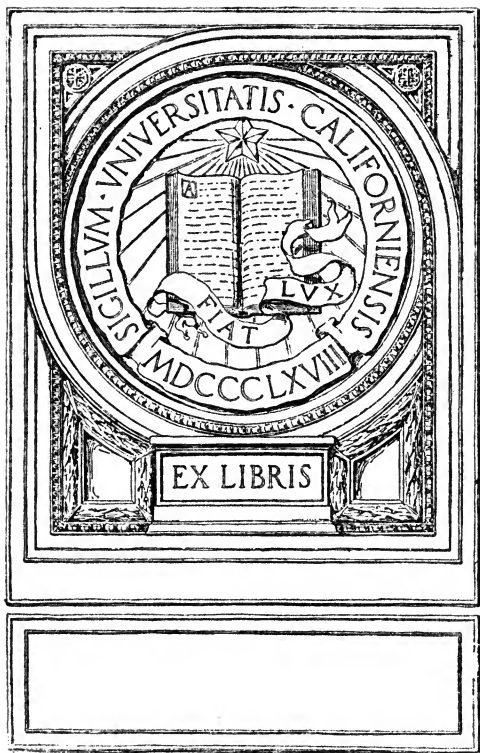
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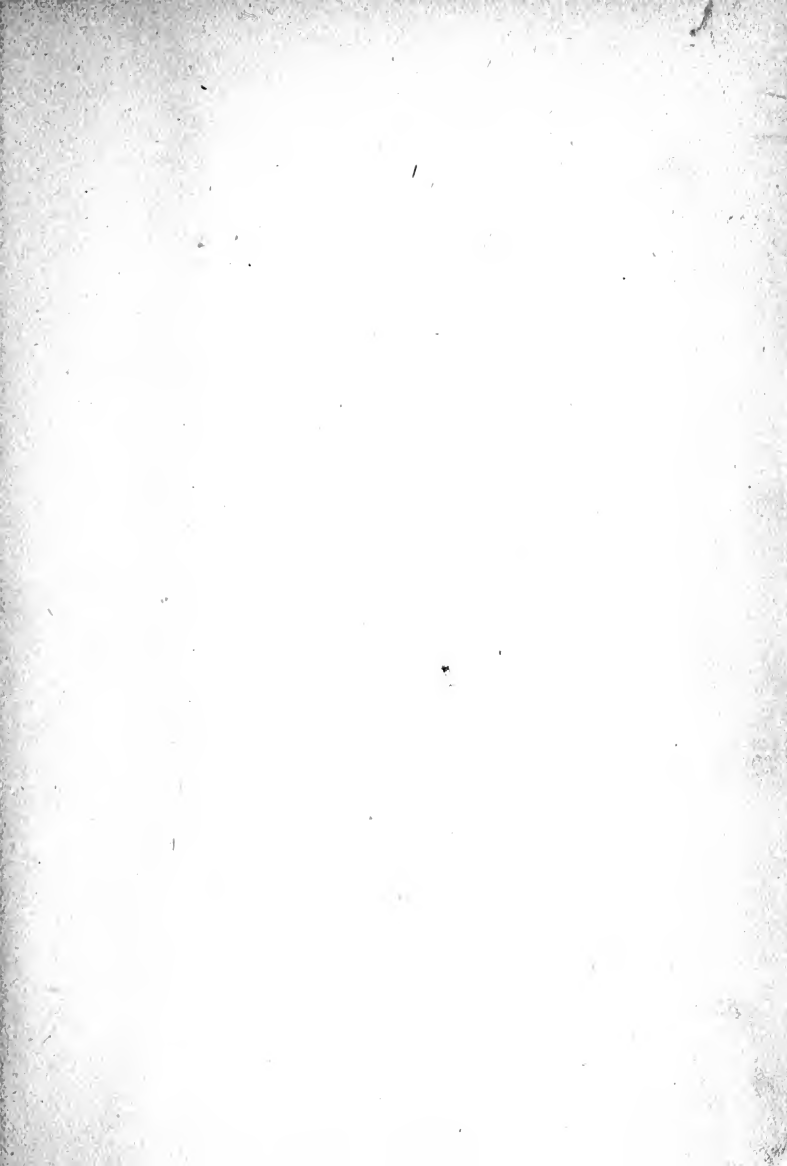
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MAVREEN'S  
FAIRING



"RAIN, RAIN, & SUN! A RAINBOW ON THE LEA!  
AND TRUTH IS THIS TO ME, & THAT TO THEE;  
AND TRUTH OR CLOTHED OR NAKED LET IT BE"

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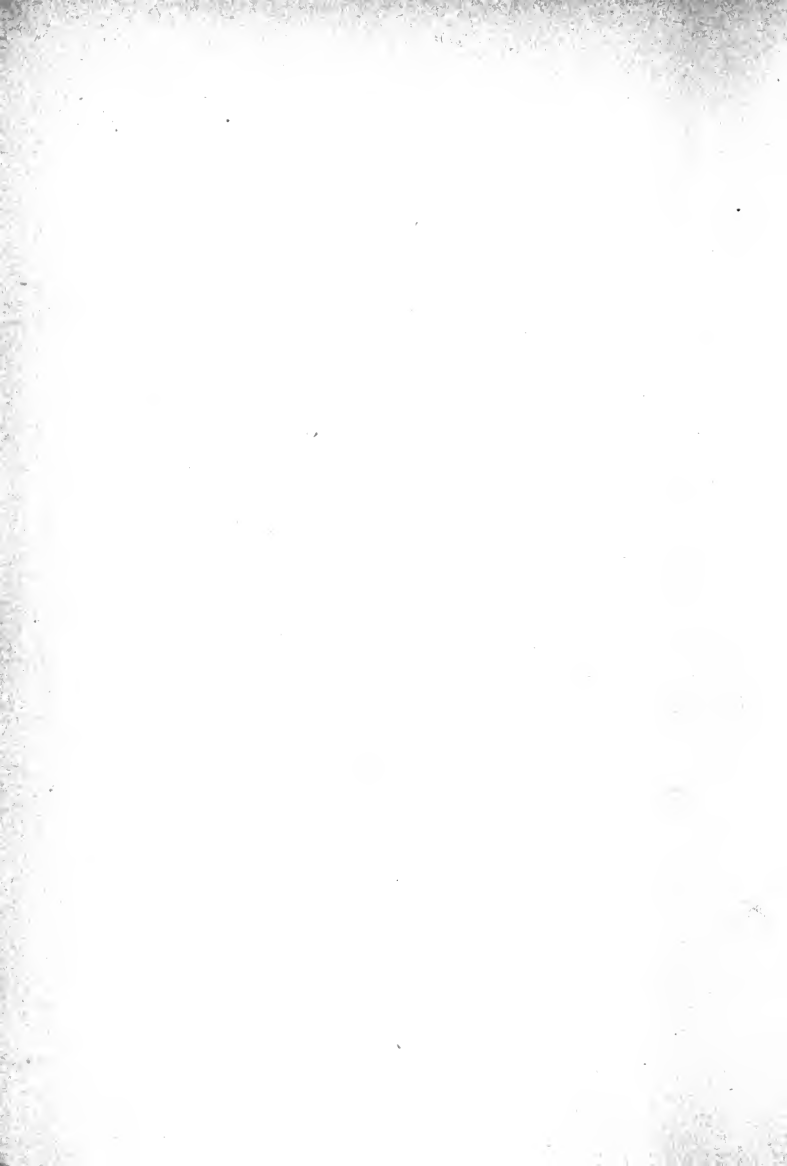


"WHATEVER happens is as common and well-known as a rose in the spring, or an apple in autumn. . . . Everywhere up and down, ages and histories, towns and families are full of the same stories."—MARCUS ANTONINUS.

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## NOTE

“An Escape” appeared in *The Cornhill Magazine*; “Mac’s Luncheon,” “A Formidable Rival,” and “The Murphys’ Supper” in *The Whitehall Review*. I am indebted to the Editors of these periodicals for permission to reprint the stories here.



## CONTENTS

MAUREEN'S FAIRING ( <i>Illustrated—Frontispiece</i> )	PAGE	I
A CREAM-COLOURED CACTUS ( <i>Illustrated</i> )	. . .	23
A FORMIDABLE RIVAL	. . .	55
A YEAR AND A DAY ( <i>Illustrated</i> )	. . .	82
MAC'S LUNCHEON ( <i>Illustrated</i> )	. . .	94
STOPPED BY SIGNAL ( <i>Illustrated</i> )	. . .	118
AN ESCAPE	. . .	147
THE MURPHYS' SUPPER ( <i>Illustrated</i> )	. . .	167



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## MAUREEN'S FAIRING.

“WELL, good-night to you kindly, ma'am,” said Mrs Halpin to Mrs O'Dell, who had escorted her guest to the gap in the low furzy bank, which formed her entrance gate. As the two old women stood at it, they were looked down upon by almost the whole height of a dark mountain, whose purple summit was crested and jagged like the battlements of a thunder-cloud; for the white and russet cabin had been set only a little way up the first climbing slope. Across the narrow valley they confronted a range of hills softer and greener, whose ridge still rose into the light of the summer sun-setting; but the valley itself was full of long shadows, and its windings ended to right and left in a faint haze, paler and dimmer than the melting gyres of blue smoke.

"I dunno what to say to it at all," said Mrs O'Dell, who having discussed the situation thoroughly with her gossip indoors, was naturally inclined to reopen the subject at the last moment. "Not a soul, so to spake, to be doin' a hand's turn about the place, except meself, that hasn't as much strength left in me as you'd put on the point of a knife. Sure it's to wrack and ruin we're goin' as aisy as a horse runnin' away down hill. And as for the rint—after gettin' no price for our fine heifer."—

"'Deed then, ma'am," said Mrs Halpin, "I always said you were a cruel unlucky woman, wid your poor son and the wife took on you that way, and the granddaughter not able for anythin', bein' dark, the crathur, the Lord may pity her. But there's that brother of her's now—sure Rody's a big grown lad, and if he was worth a thraneen at all, he might be keepin' things together for the two of yous."

"Is it Rody? Ah, now, I wouldn't say



he was too bad-manin' a poor lad whatever," said Rody's grandmother; "but sorra the ha'porth of use. Moonin' about the place he'll be from mornin' till night, and what he'll ha' got done at the end of it the dear knows, only it isn't a stroke of work. Bedad it's surprisin' the sinse he hasn't got, and he no stookawn, mind you, all the time. Ready enough he is at the book-learnin'. Some talk he has of the school-master findin' him a place off away at Kilmacrum, but I wouldn't think he'll ever go for to be lavin' Maureen; and its lost she'd be widout him. Rael good he is to her, I'll say that for him. He'd be hard set to make more of her if she could see from this to the land of Agypt and back agin."

"Sure, woman dear, it's a quare world entirely," said Mrs Halpin, resorting to general propositions for lack of any more particularly appropriate, "and the longer you live in it, the quarer it seems to be gettin'. You'd ha' thought you'd be apt

to grow used to it, och wirra, it's the other way round . . . But, musha, there's himself creepin' home," she continued, pointing to a figure on the road a little way below. "I must be steppin' along after him, for if he come to our place afore me, like enough he might have it in blazes over our heads, and he fiddlin' with the fire; he's that foostherin' and feeble these times, poor man."

"Somewhiles," said Mrs O'Dell, "it seems to me the whole of us together's no better than the black ould flies, when it's near winther on them, and they do be crawlin' about on their legs just for the name of keepin' alive. Och, but I'll be glad meself to creep into me bed now as soon as the childher come in. These fine evenins they're mostly sittin' up above there at the ould Rath; and they've such contintment together, the crathurs, that I hav'n't the heart to be bawlin' them in, as long as there's a shadow of light in the air at all."

To the old Rath a short length of steep

path led up through a screen of stunted oaks and beeches. It was a circular space of smooth green turf, marked out by curved banks of the same material, now worn down to a very unobtrusively artificial aspect. Here and there they were fortified by bushes of thorn and briar, but in one place they had crumbled into a wide gap, giving on the mountain slope, rougher ground with tussocks and clumps of coarse grass and furze and bracken. About this time Rody O'Dell and his twin sister, Maureen, who was blind, were sitting under a sloe bush nearly opposite to the gap. Rody looked as if he had on a burnished copper skullcap, his red hair was so short and sleek, and his grey eyes were light and bright ; but Maureen was black-haired, and her eyes were much the colour of the wild violets which she had sometimes gathered, though never seen. She had now pulled a spike of foxglove blooms, and was poking her finger down their speckled throats with an air of enjoyment. Her touch was so fine that it only pilfered a little gold dust

from each without hurt to the frailest filament. Rody was whittling away at a snaggy piece of a stick.

"Themselves had a right to be in it soon," Maureen said presently; and Rody replied: "Sure they'll be comin' this now, no fear." However the girl listened, and the boy looked for some minutes more, and nothing seemed to arrive. Then both of them exclaimed at once with suppressed eagerness: "Here they are." There was not apparently much cause for excitement. Ordinarily sharp ears might never have noticed the faint rustling among the drier fern-fronds; ordinarily keen eyes might have overlooked in the thickening light the whisked glimpses of white and brown, scuttling from clump to clump; and, in fact, it was after all merely the rabbits coming out to play in the dusk. Yet the event had plainly deep interest for the two O'Dells. Rody left off whittling his stick, and kept a close watch on the scampering rushes, while Maureen sat still with the expression of one who expects news.

At last she said: "Is there plinty of them comin' to-night, Rody?" "Ay is there," he said; "sure the place is thick wid them along under the big bohalawns."

"Ah, now that's great," said Maureen, with a sigh of satisfaction, for she, of course, knew as well as possible that these golden-tufted rag-weeds are especially sacred to the little people, and may be orthodoxly associated with their proceedings. "And what 'ud you think they're goin' to be at to-night, Rody?" she asked again after a short silence.

"Just let me see," said Rody, staring hard in among the curved bracken-stalks and flat furze-boughs. "I'll tell you what—I declare to goodness, it looks like as if it was a fair they were having—ay, bedad, and it is so; a cattle fair, no less, wid every manner of little baste a-dhrivin' out to it. Och, but that bates all."

"Good-luck to them then," said Maureen, "that's grand entirely. Sure you never seen the likes of it before. And what sort of crathurs is the fairy bastes?"

"Sure just the one thing wid what cattle we have ourselves," said Rody, "only the quarest little bigness on them that ever you beheld. Bejabers now, there's a drove of bullocks after goin' by, and scarce a one of them the size of a *keerhogue* (clock). The whole of them 'ud trot aisy on the palm of me hand."

"Och, glory be to goodness to think of that. And is there any horses and sheep in it, and pigs?"

"Plinty, bedad. Is it pigs? Faix, here's a little feller comin' along wid a couple, and he is as drunk as a fiddler, or I might say ould Dan Cosby that I seen dhròppin' in a hape off the car yisterday below Letterdrum."

"I never heard tell the good people 'ud be drinkin'," said Maureen, looking rather scandalised.

"Ah, well, sure maybe he's only lettin' on. But what 'ud you suppose they've got be way of cattle-pens? The peelins of the apple you had aitin' here last night. They've set it up on an end in a ring like, and where it doesn't

raich quite far enough, they've joined it wid dandelion stalks as iligant as you plase."

"'Deed, now, that's a fine invintion whatever. It's themselves do be rael cute."

"And here's a fairy man and a boy, and they ladin' a big sturk of a shaggy ould bull. Be the same token, they'll have their own work wid him, for a crosser lookin' ould divil I niver set eyes on. Bedad, if he was as big as he's little, he'd be apt to be doin' destruction on all before him; but sure you could lift him between your finger and thumb, same as if it was a dowluff; and suppose he tried hornin' you, 'twould be no more than a sort of prickle." To illustrate this, Rody broke off a sloe-thorn, and gently prodded the back of his sister's hand. "There, you might think that was him," he said, "and he lettin' a weeny roar—*moo-oo-ah*—like a hummin' bee goin' by in the air."

"And the hair on him 'ud be somethin' as soft and furry feelin'," said Maureen reflectively. "Them fairy bastes must be gay little crathurs. Rody, I wish to goodness

'twould stay summer wid us all the year round, the way we'd get the chance to be watchin' for them ivery evenin'. But go on tellin' me what all else they have."

"Musha, all manner of iverythin'. Here's a one of them jiggin' along on a terrible fine sorrel horse, a thrifle higher-standin' than a big grass-hopper. Thunder and turf! More power to your honour's elbow—sure there was a throop of pigs and such thrapesin' in front of him that put him past his patience, so he up and lep clane over the back of a *bonyeen* (young pig), and its after frightenin' a little ould woman till she's let a pair of chuckens flutter out of her basket on her—troth you might think they were a couple of specklety moths flickerin' over the grass—and now the whole lot's high-skyin' after them as hard as they can pelt be way of catchin' them . . . Och, and to see the rate a flock of wee black-faced sheep's racin' round and round a stalk of hemlock, wid their bit of a colley doin' his endeavours to turn them; but they're past his conthrol."



"It's quare that I don't hear e'er a bark out of him," said Maureen, "for when they're drivin' the sheep on the hills over beyond there, I hear them yap-yappin' the length of the day, and themselves as far off as you'd run in an hour or more."

"But sure there aren't many could bate you at hearin', Maureen," said Rody, "and you don't considher what a scrapeen of a crathur it is. A good-sized ladybird might as well be settin' up for a dog. He couldn't rise a noise 'ud raich that far, not if he barked wid ivery bone in his body."

"Sure not at all," Maureen said acquiescently, being wont to regard Rody's utterances as conclusively oracular. Still her face kept its listening expression, and in a minute she said: "There—I heard somethin' that time."

She was not mistaken. But when the approaching sounds strengthened into distinctness, they proved to be caused by very merely a mortal. Across the tussocky slope came a tall young man in a sailor's blue jersey, with

a black woollen cap on his head, and in his hand a redly wrapped-up bundle. As he passed along, rabbits dived out of sight all around, but bobbed up again almost before the parted bracken-fronds had swung together.

"Why, it's Christy M'Kenna," said Rody, "I seen him yisterday down below. What the mischief's bringin' him here?" Rody's tone implied dissatisfaction with the event, whatever the cause might have been, and Maureen looked half inclined to run away like the rabbits; but she compromised the matter by drawing her little heather-green shawl further over her black hair, and shrinking into the shadow of the sloe-bush.

"Good evenin' to yous," said Christy, coming up to the bank. "Well Rody, did you get anythin' of a dacint price for the little heifer? 'Twas but a slack fair." There was nothing repellent or formidable in the good-humoured bronze of Christy's visage, and his voice struck Maureen as being rather reassuringly pleasant, though she feared that it would scare away the fairy folk.

"Och, she wint chape enough; cattle was down to nothin' at all," Rody replied, with some grumpy indifference of tone. He had resumed his whittling, and just now slashed at a rough knot with so little dexterity that the knife slipped out of his hand, and went flying into the tangle at his feet, an accident which added to his discomposure.

"Is it watchin' the rabbits you were?" said Christy. "There's a great gatherin' of them out on the hill-side to-night. You could have knocked them over handy wid a stick comin' through the furzes."

As Rody was groping on his hands and knees for his knife, he could not answer promptly, and before he had spoken, Maureen said, as if startled into speech: "Rabbits? I niver heard tell there were any in it. Sure it's the *fairies* there are in among the bushes, and that's what we're lookin' at."

Christy laughed a little. "Begorrah, thin, I think the rabbits has put them out of it this night, body and bones," he said, "for ne'er a sign of a *sheogue* did I notice at all at all."

"Rody sez the place is full of them," said Maureen. "Isn't it Rody?"

Her appeal placed Rody in a painful dilemma. He did not wish to undeceive her, yet he was loth to profess a belief which might seem ridiculous to the much-travelled Christy, while again pride on his sister's behalf made him shrink from obviously humouring her in the presence of a stranger. Under other circumstances the difficulty might have been got over by his mother wit, but at the moment he was out of temper, which sorely blunts the edge of shrewdness; and he adopted, perhaps, the most ill-judged course he could have chosen, when he said to Christy in what he supposed to be an aside: "Arrah now man alive, can't you whisht gabbin' about rabbits?" For Maureen's quick hearing caught the words, and they filled her with dismayed suspicion. She leaned forward, saying anxiously and eagerly: "But the good people come to the Rath here 'most ivery fine evenin'—sure, Rody, you haven't been only humbuggin' me all these times?"

But Rody remained guiltily silent, while Christy, perplexed at the girl's evident distress, answered as discreetly as he could in his ignorance of its cause: "Well, at all evints, them crathurs was all I seen about just now; but sure there might aisy ha' been an odd fairy or so through them, and I niver notice it. They'll do no harm any way, here or there."

This philosophic view of the matter was not consolatory to Maureen. She rose to her feet, and stood for a moment with drooping head. "I wish," she said without looking up, "I wish I had the sight of me eyes, the way that people couldn't be makin' a fool of me." Then she turned slowly away, and sat down again on the bank at a little distance. I think she had lost something more than her evening's entertainment, and her faith in Rody—certain vague dreams based upon traditions of wonderful cures wrought by the good people when found in a kindly mood, a chance that might happen to anybody one of those days. The two young men eyed

each other ruefully through the gathering dusk. Said Christy in an undertone : " What ails her at all ? "

" Botheration to it," said Rody, " sure you see, she not havin' her sight, we do be at a loss now and agin for a bit of divarsion ; so I used to get tellin' her quare ould invintions, whin the rabbits come out here of an evenin', lettin' on to her 'twas the fairies were in it, and this way and that way. And, bedad, now themselves is the comical little divils wid their thricks and their capers, and that's no lie," he added, as if in self-defence. Strange as the freak of conscience may appear, it is a fact that on nights when no rabbits were to be seen, he had never reported any fairy doings. " She'd take a won'erful pleasure in hearin' about anythin' off the common like ; but she won't now that she knows 'twas only romancin'. And I doubt she's a thrifle vexed, the crathur," Rody said, glancing compunctiously towards his sister.

" Ah, now, that's a rael bad job," said Christy, with unfeigned concern. " Faith,

if I'd known, I'd ha' liefer lost a month's pay than to be spoilin' her stories on her. But, sure, if it's a fancy she has for hearin' curious things, I meself could be tellin' her plenty that 'ud surprise her finely, and as thrue, more betoken, as the sky over our heads. Why, what 'ud you say to an affair I seen, maybe a little better than a couple of months ago," Christy went on, raising his voice, not unintentionally, "and we sailin' home from the United States? A big hill, the full size of one of them forninst us, swimmin' along on the say, and ivery bit of it nothin' but clane ice, as clear and as green as the deep wather; the same as if you could be buildin' up a great hape o' rowlin' waves, and the top of it all white, powdered wid snow, like as if it was settlin' to foam over the edges. That's quare now? And a grand watherfall leppin' right down from the heighth of it, wid the sun turnin' it all the colours in the rainbow, till the sparklin' of it 'ud 'most"—

An indignant murmur from Rody cut him short: "Musha, man, where'd be the sinse of

blatherin' about rainbows sparklin', to her that's had niver a chance to see a shine out of the sun in all her life's days? Sure, when I'm tellin' her aught, I keep describin' the things accordin' to the littleness and bigness of them, and the feelin' and shapes they have; and so she gets some sort of notion what I'm talkin' about. But you may let the sun alone."

Upon this a crestfallen silence succeeded Christy's traveller's tale. Presently, however, his face brightened with a sudden thought, and he began to unknot a corner of his bundle. "Whethen now, only I was stookawn enough to nearly disremimber it," he said, "I've somethin' here she might belike take a fancy to." He extricated a beautiful tropical shell, whose lily-white whorls were lined with a flush of wild-rose pink. "Would'nd you think she might be plased handlin' that?" he said. "And the say hummin' it has in it she could hear as well, in course, as another."

"She might, may be," Rody said, doubtfully; and Christy considered himself encouraged to try the experiment. Going over to Maureen,



he touched her hand softly with the shell, saying in his most persuasive manner: "Just thry the feel of that in your hand, mavourneen. I'm afther showin' it to your brother there, and he's in great admiration of it."

Maureen took the shell, and ran her fingers swiftly along the delicate outlines, fine in texture as a blossom, and firm as marble. A happier look stole into her face. "What at all is it?" she said.

"Sure it's just a sort of shell. I picked it up meself one day off the strand near the town of Kingston, in Jamaicy. Lyin' it was in the sand, that's as soft there as fine male, and as hot as if it was gettin' a bake in the oven. But hold it to your ear a minute—so, that a-way—and you'll hear somethin' 'ill surprise you."

"Saints above!" said Maureen, listening, not without awe. "It's like the win' blustherin' by when you're under the tree branches, wid a sound of the chapel-bell through it, as if 'twas near blown away; and somethin' else besides—I dunno what."

"That's the taste of the say-waves roarin';

it's kep' inside it. Och, now, you wouldn't be askin' me to take it back? Keep it yourself, jewel, and then you can be hearin' it hummin' whenever you please. I've plinty more the same, only diff'rent pattrons. Some of them's as round and as shiny as a chiny bowl, and some's the shape of grand big saucers. And I've a string of bades, the iligantest blue colour—och, no matter about that—but they're that smooth you could scarce hold them from slippin' out of your hand. And I've the quarest sort of a big ball, that looks to be wound round and round and round wid threads of silk as thin as cobwebs; and what's inside of it I can't say, but, if you shake it, you'll hear it rattlin' like a *glugger* (bad egg). It's somethin' rael uncommon, I'm thinkin'. So, if you'd e'er a fancy to see them, I'd step over, and bring them to-morra, wid all the pleasure in life. I lost me ship be raison of me father bein' took bad last week, and I'm stoppin' a while wid me sister down at Letterdrum. May be them things 'ud divert you a bit."

"Ay would they," Maureen said, softly.

At this moment a shrill and querulous call came quavering up the hill: "Childher, musha, good gracious, childher, is it sittin' out there you'd be till the sun's risin', and keepin' me waitin' up for you, wid the head noddin' off of me shoulders?"

"There's granny lettin' a screech to us," said Rody, standing up from his search for his knife, and glad to end what seemed to him an unlucky evening. "We had a right to be goin' in."

"Well, I'll step over here to-morra wid the whole of them," Christy said to Maureen, "about this time, or perhaps in the mornin', if I can; but I'll bring them, at any rate."

"They'll be grand," said Maureen. "And—and I'd like to hear tell, mind you, about the big ice hill, wid the watherfall on it, and all. Sure I know well enough about the sun shinin'. It's only the way Rody will be talkin'," she said, with rather ungrateful disparagement. Indeed, from henceforth, I believe, Rody, regarded as her oracle, may be said to have fallen dumb.

One fine rose-latticed evening, a few weeks later, old Mrs O'Dell had another gossip with

her neighbour, Mrs Halpin, standing at her door. "Ay, indeed, it's a great thing for us entirely," said she, in reply to a congratulatory remark. "The M'Kennas is a rael dacint family, and Christy has a bit of money saved that he's willing to put in the farm. And Rody's got a fine place down below at Athbeg, that he's goin' to after the weddin'. Och, now, who'd ha' iver thought of such a thing happenin' Maureen, the crathur? Sure I sez to Christy himself, when he was talkin' to me about it: 'Goodness help you, lad,' sez I, 'and what at all will you be doin' wid only a dark wife to keep house for you?' And sez he to me: 'Bedad, ma'am, I'll tell you that aisy, if you'll tell me what I'm to do widout her; for me soul to the saints, if I know, be any manner of manes.' That's what he said. Christy's always plisant. There, that's the three of them comin' along the lane. Ay, sure it's great good luck altogether."





BERTHA NEWCOMBE

## A CREAM-COLOURED CACTUS.

MRS KELLY'S little house stood rather widely aloof from the village of Ballyhoy, at the end of a long straight stretch of lane, down which her two small arched windows seemed always to peer anxiously. She often did so herself, especially after her only son and companion Bob had gone to live permanently as stable-helper at Dunmellin House, a couple of miles away. This had happened one New Year, and by the following Midsummer she was not yet at all accustomed or reconciled to the change, having still a tendency to look down the road with half an expectation that some improbable errand would bring Bob along it, thus incurring many more than half-disappointments, which depressed and irritated her, and disposed her to quarrel with what pleasant

things did actually come about. In fact, when Bob visited her of a Sunday afternoon, he sometimes met with a reception grumpy enough to make him almost doubt his welcome ; yet if he failed to reappear next week, she fretted herself ten years older between dinner and bed-time. Her small household affairs left her ample leisure for such self-tormenting, and allowed her scanty scope for more profitable pursuits. You are comparatively well-to-do if you can afford to occupy yourself rationally ; and Mrs Kelly was very poor. Her chief amusement was the care of a few geraniums, which stood on the deep ledges inside her windows, and made the light quiver greenly through thick crimped leaves. For a long time they thrived wonderfully, and were constantly pressing great trusses of scarlet and white and pink against the diamond panes. Mrs Kelly would survey these proudly, and their effect as seen from without was the first thought that occurred to her whenever she descried anybody of consequence coming down the lane ; for she was a rather vain and ostentatious old woman.



But one glittering January night, soon after Bob left home, the frost struck into her room, and so shrewdly nipped most of her plants, that by morning their leave shung limply down like rags, and presently blackened and shrivelled away until only dry withered sticks remained in the desolated pots. Accordingly, when summer came, her show of blossom was poor indeed, and it was with vexation of spirit that she watered the stalky straggling remnant out of her little lilac-rimmed jug. She said she might as well spare herself the trouble for any good they'd ever do; there wasn't a one of them now that 'ud be worth picking up off the side of the road; and, of course, nothing 'ud suit the frost except to take and destroy her big salmon-pink on her, that used to have heads on it the size of your two fists. It happened that on a Sunday evening late in June, she mourned over them thus when her son was by. He was sitting on the deal table, and watching her pass from one window to the other, small and wizened, in her white cap and apron, and black skirt and little

shepherd's-plaid shawl. The descending sun shone full on the windows, disregarding the weedy geranium screen; it strongly lit up her wrinkled face, where the lines were all down-drawn by regret, as she poured brief sparkling streams from her jug with a hand no longer steady. Suddenly Bob said: "Be the hoky, mother, I'll see if I can't pick up some sort of a plant in a pot for you at Hamilton's auction on Thursday. The gardener at our place was sayin' he seen a good few in th' ould greenhouse there 'ud all be sold off, and apt to go reasonable enough. Them kind of things get no prices at auctions. So I'll thry can I slip in one way or the other, and look after them. Very belike there might be a pink one in it."

At this his mother brightened up in a twinkling, as well she might, since, simple though it may seem, the promise wrapped her round in several folds of pleasure. For it not only gave her the prospect of a fine new plant, but it was furthermore a proof that Bob liked to please her, and that he still possessed the

means of doing as he liked, despite the burden of maintaining her out of his wages. Clearly, he must have a spare shilling or so in his pocket—and to think of the poor lad spending it on her fancies. As he sat there in his grey best suit and bright green tie, she said to herself that you wouldn't easily find a finer young man in the county Dublin, or a better son; and the reflection gave her a sense of proprietorship in all kinds of splendid possibilities. So, although what she said aloud was: "Och musha, child alive, don't go wastin' your money on any such ould thrash," they both knew quite well that the words were merely conventional politeness. And Mrs Kelly was a happy woman that night as, watching him recede down the lane, she bethought her how she might expect next Thursday evening to see him reappear laden with something florally rich and strange. She always pictured Bob's plant in the very fullest blow.

The resolve whereby Bob enabled himself to hold out these hopes to his mother was one which he would have found it hard to form

otherwise than, as he did, on the spur of a ruthless moment. For he had intended to put his shillings on Mr Hill's Finola at the approaching Portbrendan races, an investment bound to yield fabulous returns with what would have been a dead certainty save for the faint breath of doubt which is essential to the existence of that fascinating thing "a grand chance." Yet on even second thoughts he still kept to his promised purchase, "Or it's only disappointin' her I'd be, the crathur," and the auction luckily came first.

It was well on towards seven o'clock on Thursday evening when Bob arrived at Ballyhoy Hall, where the gate-piers were whitened over with placards of the sale. He had feared, while grooming Dame Trot, that he would be too late, but he found that the auctioneer was still voluble in the gaunt old house, and the out-of-door effects had not yet come to the hammer. The deserted gardens through which he strolled while waiting for this to take place, showed signs of many seasons' neglect, rankest perhaps where the long low greenhouse was almost

smothered in the tangle of miscellaneous weeds sprung up about it. Ranged at the door, however, he observed a line of flower-pots, before which he planted himself as if he had taken root. Their contents were, indeed, for the most part sorry specimens of life that had struggled through such vicissitudes as beset a careless-ordered conservatory, and they all showed traces of hardship, stunting and distorting, all except a group of cactuses, which had by inheritance a capacity for adapting themselves to barren places. Notwithstanding several months' oblivion on an out-of-the-way shelf, their ungainly dull-green stems, knobby and thorny, neither drooped nor dwindled, and had just now burst into gorgeous blossom. Hardly one of them but lifted up its cup of scarlet glowing into iridescent sheen of purple, curved round delicate stamens like a dimly golden sheaf of elfin grain. "Well now, them bates anythin' I ever seen," was Bob's sentiment, as he stood in front of them. "Herself at home 'ud be as consaited as a dog wid two tails, if she had a one to stand in her ould windy. But I'd

suppose now the likes of those 'ud come expensive?" he said aloud to Neddy Wogan, the only other bystander. Neddy, a small boy who did odd jobs in the Warrens' garden, and considered himself an authority on horticultural matters, thought them sort was nothin' off the common, and apt to go chape enough; but he dashed the hopes thus raised by daresaying that they wouldn't be sold only in one lot altogether, and might fetch as much as ten shillings, a forecast that put them hopelessly out of reach.

Just then the auctioneer with his following came round the corner, and Bob made sure that he would have his chance at any rate. However this was not to be. For by bad luck his master, Colonel Purdon, almost immediately espied him, and bade him run down to the Post-office with an overlooked letter, and lose no time about it, or else it would miss the last mail. This inopportune commission defeated Bob's project of himself buying and carrying home the plant. A hasty transference of his two shillings to Neddy Wogan, with the request that he would make the best bargain he could, and keep a penny for

himself, and bring whatever he got home to the mother, "the way she wouldn't be disappointed," was all Bob could accomplish before he started on his trot through the lanes, and across the hayfields, where shadows were growing eastward of the big cocks.

About the same time his mother was entertaining Mrs Finucane, who had looked in on her way home from the auction, where she had acquired a highly superior flat-iron and a zinc bucket for next door to nothing at all. Similarity in circumstances had caused a sort of tacit rivalry between Mrs Kelly and Mrs Finucane, both being widows possessed of an only son. On the whole, large, complacent Mrs Finucane had decidedly the advantage over her little restless-minded neighbour. Her cottage was more commodious, and her weekly shillings more numerous. But, above all, her Tommy had not long since been appointed what she called Head-gardener at Grangeville, where, it is true, his one subordinate was little Neddy Wogan, whose services, too, were only casual and intermittent. "And Tommy but just goin' on

for four-and-twenty—the same age as your Bob, ma'am," she would remark with as much wondering triumph as if the post had carried a seat in the Cabinet. To set against this Mrs Kelly had not much except her own opinion of Bob's personal superiority over Tommy, a point upon which she could not with manners overtly insist. Even though she did strain fact so far as to speak of her son as Colonel Purdon's second coachman, the Head-gardenership still inevitably ranked higher. Consequently she was well pleased on the present occasion to cap Mrs Finucane's successful bargains with the announcement that Bob likewise had been down buying at the auction, and that she was expecting him home every minute with "what he would be after gettin'."

"'Deed now, was he?" said Mrs Finucane, "I didn't happen to be seein' him."

"Sure he'd nothin' to be bringin' him into the house where you was, ma'am," Mrs Kelly replied suavely. "It's there you'd go, I should suppose, if you was a-wantin' of *kitchen* articles and such—'Deed that's a very good strong bucket you've



got, ma'am ; the ones I seen hangin' outside of Graham's in Talbot Street wasn't much better, to say, and they're maybe dearer. And that's a handy iron, too, when you have to be makin' up. I don't throuble meself wid messin' over much washin' these times. Bob won't let me take in a bit, tho' I do be tellin' him I'm as well able for it as ever I was ; och no, never a let he'll let me, good or bad. But 'twasn't them descripshin of things he went lookin' after ; the notion he had was to get somethin' tasty in the way of a windy-plant."

"Ah tub be sure," said Mrs Finucane, good-humouredly. She generally was as impervious to innuendo as incapable of it, but sometimes, in turn, stumped over people's feelings in an irrespective cow-like manner, without malice. "Ah tub be sure, the most of yours looks to be dyin' on you. My Tommy, now, keeps me full up wid cuttins and seedlins, and all sorts, that he'd be throwin' away, on'y for bringin' them home. I've had a grand double-white geranium this long while sittin' in me windy, a livin' mass of flower ; you might have noticed

it goin' by." Mrs Kelly had not failed to do so, but she said with polite surprise: "Have you then, ma'am? I never happint to mind it." "And so poor Bob's about gettin' you another. Ay, somebody at the auction was tellin' me they have a lot of them great big red flowers in the garden—quackuses they're called; I mind the name be thinkin' of the ducks. I didn't go look at them, for I seen plinty the same sort last week when Tommy was showin' me over his glass-houses. Rael fine coloured things they are. I was sayin' to him that if you took and stuck a couple of them in the grate, you couldn't hardly tell the differ between them and a fire flarin'. And bedad, 'twouldn't be a bad kind of a fire to have lightin' this weather. Powerful hot it is ma'am, I'm fairly scalded what wid standin' about in the throng of people was in it, and walkin' this far under the weight of me warm shawl." "It's one of them he'll be apt to get me, onless, in course, he's seen anythin' better," said Mrs Kelly, mentally clearing the most conspicuous place in her sunniest window for the scarlet blossoms, "He might be here agin now, and

there's a step comin' along, if I'm not mistaken."

She was not mistaken as to the bare fact, but all the attendant circumstances were woefully disappointing. For when the steps turned in at her door, it appeared that they had been conducting thither, not her tall Bob, who had a full two inches the better of Tommy Finucane, but merely Neddy Wogan, a shrimp of a lad, scarcely in his teens, and small at that. And Bob's unimposing substitute bore a flower-pot, which, it could be seen at a glance, contained nothing in the least degree answering to Mrs Kelly's brilliant expectations. The plant it held was an unshapely little dingy-green object, with flakes of dusty cobweb hanging from its shrivelled thorns, and never a sign of bud or blossom. In fact, you might have looked for such things almost as hopefully upon Mrs Kelly's white-washed walls or smoke-stained dresser, so very ancient was its aspect. Neddy set it on the table with a dull thump, and jingled down some pennies beside it. "Bob had to quit before the plants were sold," he explained, "so he gev me

the money, and bid me get the best I could. And they cleared off all the blossomin' ones while me back was turned for a minute ; so that was the best I could do. Bad luck to th' ould thorns of it, I've a half dozen of them in me thumb. And it come to one-and-fipence, and a penny I was to keep meself, and there's sixpence in coppers." He departed hurriedly supperwards, and left the two old women surveying the flowerless cactus. Mrs Kelly made no remark. Mrs Finucane said : " Och now, that was a pity ; they're nothin' widout the blossom. I wouldn't ha' given that price for it. But sure if there's any life in it, maybe it might happen to have some on it next year ; on'y that's a terrible long while to be lookin' forward." She was stooping to examine it more closely, when Mrs Kelly whisked it suddenly away, and dumped it down on the window-seat out of reach. " It's an uncommon nice one as ever I seen," she said all in a single syllable, " What was that you were sayin', ma'am, about Tim Gatchell gettin' married ? "

But when she had got rid of her visitor,

she spent a long time in mortified and miserable reflections upon her disappointment, which she embittered by mingling it with sundry harsh surmises. "It was a quare story," she said to herself, "if they had nothin' better than the likes of that in it, and Mrs Finucane just after tellin' her she'd seen plenty in blossom. The fact of the matter was, that Bob didn't want to spend his money on her, so he'd took any ould thrash he could get chape. And, signs on it, he was ashamed to come home wid it himself." Then she relented, and called herself an ungrateful ould toad to be down on the poor lad that-a-way, after all he done for her. It was no thanks to Mrs Finucane's lump of a boy if he did bring her home fine plants itself when he could get them for nothin'. Some folks had the luck. But as for talkin' of that ould show flowerin' next year, sure she might be dead and buried twenty times over afore then, and she didn't care if she was. So she thrust the ugly pot into the obscurest corner of the window, behind a dreary skeleton geranium, and went gloomily to bed.

One clear-skied Saturday evening about a fortnight later, Tommy Finucane, the head-gardener, went strolling along the lane towards his mother's house in a perturbed frame of mind. He was a youth upon whom the cares of office sat heavily, and at this time he had been caused much concern by a loss which special circumstances made peculiarly unfortunate. As he was passing Mrs Kelly's twinkling sunset-lit windows, his eyes fell upon something which at once brought him to a halt, and kept him standing irresolute outside the door for a minute or two. Presently he sauntered on again, but had not gone a hundred yards when he abruptly faced about, and came back much faster. Then he once more peered earnestly in at the window, and finally knocked with his stick on the door. He did so with misgivings, as his disposition was diffident, and Mrs Kelly's manners were not seldom formidable. On this occasion her "Good evenin'?" was so coldly interrogative that he could think of nothing more to the purpose than to blurt out: "And what news

have you of Bob, Mrs Kelly?" It was not apparently an auspicious beginning. Mrs Kelly responded in an aggrieved tone: "Och, indeed, nobody need be throublin' themselves comin' to me for news of Bob. Three weeks it'll be to-morra since I set eyes on him, and he sent off to the County Meath wid the young horses the Colonel's puttin' out on grass. The dear knows how long he may be kep' down there, if he ever gets out of it at all, which isn't over likly." She was in reality expecting Bob's return every day, and this dismal forecast was prompted by her disappointment at finding who had knocked.

"I was thinkin' he might maybe ha' wrote," said Tomny apologetically.

"Sure, who said he didn't write? And what's writin'? You might be botherin' yourself over an ould bit of a scrawl the len'th of the day, and not get as much sinse out of it at the heel of the hunt as anybody could be talkin' to you while you was openin' the cover. I wouldn't give you a thank-you for all the letters was ever stamped," said Mrs Kelly, whose eyes sparkled like danc-

ing water whenever the postman stopped at her door.

It seemed to Tommy that the preliminaries were not going off well, and had better be abridged. "That's a grand blossom, ma'am," he said, "you have on the cactus there in the windy."

"Goodness may tell what you're talkin' about," said Mrs Kelly in a tone of indignant repudiation, "sorra the blossom I've had a chance of this long while—I've somethin' else to do than to be wastin' me time mindin' them."

"But indeed and indeed, Mrs Kely, your cactus is splendid entirely, and a crame-coloured one more betokin'," averred Tommy. "Just step outside, and you'll see it there in the corner." Mrs Kelly, however, darted to the window, and for the confutation of Tommy, twirled round her despised pot. "Och, mercy on us all, did you ever witness the like of that?" she exclaimed with a sort of awe. For, sure enough, on the grotesque spiny stem shone a great blossom, of a hue and texture but coarsely matched by creams and satin. The light played



over it in shimmerings of faint lilac and mother-o'-pearl, and a waft of most delicate fragrance, as if from far-distant spice-islands, stole out on the smoky air. "Thrue for you, Tommy, it's what you may call iligant," she said, brightening up into a gleam of good humour.

"Didn't I tell you so, ma'am?" said Tommy, taking heart, "sure 'twas the first thing I noticed goin' by. We had a one at our place a while ago would ha' been the very moral of it by now, if somebody hadn't took it on me. I seen a bud on it, so I put it in the cool house to discourage it from bloomin' afore the misthress would be comin' home from Killiney, the way she might have a sight of it in flower. But when I went to look after it the other day, gone it was body and bones. Now, if that isn't aggravatin', and ne'er another one like it in the place, and it bein' Mr Charlie gev it to the misthress in a prisint the last time he was at home. But the conthrariest part of the matter is that they've got news be the last mail come in of his havin' been took bad wid a fever away at some place near India, and the cook was tellin'

me to-day that Lizzie wrote her word the misthress had been like a hin on a hot griddle ever since. So you may bet your boots, when she comes home on Monday, and finds some-thin's gone wid Mr Charlie's plant, the first notion she'll take in her head 'll be that it's a sign there's some misfortin about happenin' him. Lastewise," continued Tommy, unawares taking a wrong tack, "I know that's the way me mother 'ud be, if it was one of the plants I've gev her, and I off in foreign parts."

"I wouldn't wonder if Mrs Warren was apt to have more wit than to be thinkin' that foolish, whatever your mother might do," Mrs Kelly observed with a tartness which should have warned him, but he was preoccupied with his plan, and went on unheeding: "What I was thinkin', ma'am, was that maybe you wouldn't object to swappin'—exchange is no robbery, you know—and lettin' me take home this here cactus wid me, and bring you a red one instead. For if the misthress seen this one, ne'er a differ she'd know between it and her own crame-colour; they're that like, you might swear it was the very same. And

I could step over aisy any time wid the red one, for we've near a dozen of them—more than we want—all blossomin' like mad."

Tommy's proposal fell with a cold shock upon Mrs Kelly's elated glee over her newly discovered possession. At the moment, indeed, she was considering in what position the pot would most certainly catch Mrs Finucane's eye as she went by next morning to Mass. Therefore her reply was naturally uncompromising and to the point: "Whethen now, I hope you'll be gettin' your health till I go and do that. Change me grand crame-colour for one of them ould reds that is as common as dirt. Musha cock you up! And you've little to do, let me tell you, Tommy Finucane, to be comin' blatherin' here about your plants bein' took. You won't find any of them in this house, if that's what you've the impidence to be after."

"I declare to goodness, Mrs Kelly, ne'er such a thought was in me mind, ma'am, at all," protested Tommy, aghast, "The on'y thing I was thinkin', was that it 'ud pervint the misthress, the crathur, takin' idees in her head about Mr

Charlie, worse than she has already, and small blame to her, he bein' that far off you couldn't tell what might happen him. And sure I didn't know but you might as lief have a red one ; it's a good strong colour."

"Then you may keep it to yourself, if your in such an admiration of it," said Mrs Kelly, "and as for harm happenin', the Lord knows poor Bob's far away enough for anythin', and me all the while to be changin' his prisints for rubbidge. And I should suppose, for that matter, I was as apt to take bad notions in me head about me own son as anybody else's mother."

Tommy could think of nothing to urge against this claim, and he beat a retreat in much confusion, still stammering incoherent apologies. Confusion remained uppermost for some time after he had escaped into the open air ; but before he had reached the end of the white, leaf-flecked lane, resentment began to predominate. "She'd no call to be so stiff wid me," he reflected, "and I on'y makin' her a fair offer. 'Twas just one of her conthrary humours, for she doesn't care

a thraneen about the plant, or she wouldn't keep it stuffed away in a corner, and not so much as know it had a flower on it. Unless, maybe she was on'y lettin' on, and there was some other raison she had for hidin' it out of sight. Sure I couldn't say how she come by it, any more than I could tell what's gone wid the one that was the very image of it. 'Deed now, I remimber not so long ago seein' Bob Kelly up in our fields late one evenin', and wonderin' what he was at. And anybody goin' through the Twisted Meadow had nothin' to do but just slip in at the garden gate, if so happen the key wasn't turned, and walk straightways into the green-houses. Ay, bedad, it looks quare enough, the two of them plants bein' so alike in themselves." With dark hints such as these, Bob hardened his heart, and helped himself on towards the bold resolve to which he had definitively come by the time he reached home.

Next morning he proceeded to execute his design. Having timed his movements so as to arrive at Mrs Kelly's house when she was well on her way to ten o'clock Mass, he slipped

across country with a red cactus plant under his arm, taking the straightest line where the newly mown meadows lay clear before him, and skirting along the hedges of fields where the young corn was as green as the fresh after-grass. He found the door, as he had expected, securely locked, but the little window-sashes swung loosely on their bars, so that it was easy to insert a hand which withdrew the coveted pot, and substituted one "every hair as good, on'y for the sake of argufyin'," he said, salving his conscience, "even supposin' she'd ever owned the other at all be rights." When he got back to Grangeville, he found Neddy Wogan at the green-house door, waiting to ask whether his services would be required on the morrow. "I was thinkin' you'd be readyin' up agin the misthress comin' in the evenin'," he said. "Where at all did you get the crame-coloured cactus?"

"Where it was to be had," Tommy replied curtly, not caring to enter upon an explanation; but Neddy was not rebuffed. "I didn't know you had e'er another besides the one that's in

the pottin'-shed," he said, "I lifted it in there meself a couple of weeks ago, when we was clearin' the ould pots out of these houses. But I was lookin' about just now, and I see it's took and flowered, I was manin' to ha' tould you."

"And why the mischief didn't you tell me when you stirred it, you young ass?" said Tommy, "and me turnin' everythin' upside down huntin' for it. If you can't keep your hands off meddlin' wid what doesn't concern you, you'd better stop out of this place." Tommy was seriously disconcerted, for he had been encouraged to venture on the exchange by a conviction that the Kellys' guilty consciences would preclude "any talk out of them," and now this theory had collapsed. Still Neddy was unabashed, serene in the possession of a bit of thrilling news, a consciousness which above most others sets a man at ease in society. "Did you hear tell what's happint Bob Kelly?" he asked.

"I did *not*," said Tommy.

"Sure it's on one of the evenin' papers that

he was kilt wid a horse yisterday down in Meath. On'y a couple of lines it was in a corner : *A Young Man Killed*, and nobody noticed it till just now Peter Mackay did be readin' it below at Sweeny's."

"Begorrah then that's a rael dreadful thing," said Tommy, with a shocked face, "and are you sartin it was Bob himself? Is the name on it?"

"In course it is; amn't I after readin' it? But you can see it yourself down below. I'm skytin' over to Kildrum to tell his cousins," said Neddy, bound with the tidings for a household where he expected to produce a stronger sensation. Tommy acted upon this suggestion, and started for the little public, feeling himself a great sinner. Bad as it was to think how he had been accusing poor Bob of stealing what had never been stolen, and at the very time when the unlucky fellow lay dead, it seemed even worse that he should have robbed Mrs Kelly of her son's gift, the loss of which would now certainly add to her affliction. He was resolving that as soon as he had verified Neddy's report by a glance at the newspaper, he would



run across the fields again, and restore the cream-coloured cactus to its place before Mrs Kelly got home from Mass, when, to his consternation, he collided with her just outside Grangeville gate. His first impression was that, having discovered both her bereavements, she had come to reproach him; but in a moment he perceived that she had as yet heard nothing. For: "Mercy on us, man alive," she said, "it's the death of somebody you'll be one of these fine days if you go flouncing round corners that-a-way, like as if you was about takin' a header into forty fut of wather. But I was steppin' up to you about that flowerin' plant you had the talk of yisterday. You may as well be fetchin' it after all; for it's a pity to have the crathur distressin' herself more than she need, and the housemaid's after tellin' me Mr Charlie's rael indifferint be the accounts they have. So the red one 'ill do me right enough. Bob's strong and hearty, thank God, and *I've* no call to be frightenin' meself foolish wid signs."

The fact was that Tommy's request, and her own refusal of it, had ever since been to Mrs

Kelly's peace of mind as detrimental as a trickle of cold water up the sleeve is to one's bodily comfort, and the Grangeville housemaid's report of the way Mrs Warren was fretting herself into fiddlestrings had now finally routed perversity by compunction. Her relenting seemed to complicate Tommy's perplexed remorse, while her ignorant self-congratulations gave a finishing touch to her pitiableness. He would not have enlightened her for a thousand pounds. It appeared to him that the situation would be quite intolerable unless he contrived to effect a second exchange before she could return. But his hopes of doing so died as she added hurriedly: "Well, I mustn't stop. The Dalys promised me a sate home on the car, and they're waitin'. You can come for the pot any time that's convanient." For if Mrs Kelly drove, how was he to anticipate her on foot? There was now indeed nothing left him except a bare possibility that if the Dalys' roan mare happened to be luckily lazy, or if they fell in with many gossiping neighbours on the way, he might, by taking the very shortest cuts, get over just in

time to carry off the unchancy, red-blossomed cactus.

“I couldn’t do it at all if I delayed now to go back for the crame-colour,” he reflected, as he watched her brown-striped shawl round the corner, “and even so she’ll be thinkin’ I took up her word quare and quick. But sure I could bring over her own to her another time, and tell her some raison why I wouldn’t be keepin’ it. Faix, I could say we’d found ours after all—and bedad that ’ud be the truth,” he continued, surprised to recognise this bit of fact cropped up among his scheming, as he might have been to set his foot unexpectedly on a firm stone when floundering through a soft patch of bog.

The fields through which he forthwith started to run lay hot and bright, basking in the glow of the July noon. Perhaps Tommy raced the harder, and fixed his mind the more steadily on his goal, because he vaguely felt that if he paused to look and listen the broad sunbeams would fill with spectral whispers about the depths of dark and cold which had closed over poor Bob Kelly. Even so, he did not al-

together elude them, and this heightened the shock which he experienced, when, having jumped clumpily down into the lane from the last hedge-bank, and bolted round the sharp-shadowed angle of Mrs Kelly's house, he came face to face with Bob Kelly himself.

Bob it was, undoubtedly, lounging about the door, in a rather characteristically ill-humour at having found the house locked up, and nobody to receive him. "Musha, good gracious," said Tommy, "and is it there you are? Why, man, they have you kilt in the *Evenin' Star*!"

"Och, I seen that," said Bob, indifferently, "'twas the same name, but sure there's plinty of Kellys in it besides me. Only me mother 'll be risin' a row if they get gabbin' to her about it. Howane'er, if she'd have the sinse to come home out of that, she'd soon find the differ. But look you, Tommy, you that's knowledgable about plants, what am I after doin' but tiltin' the ould windy-sash back agin the big red flower she had cocked up there, and knockin' it off. It hung on be a sort of

thread like for a minute, and then took and dropped cliver and clane down the chink in the windy-stool. Would you suppose now, that it was apt to ha' fell off whether or no? Or will she be sayin' I've destroyed it?" Bob pointed disgustedly to the cactus plant, and Tommy saw with relief that it no longer flaunted the compromising scarlet blossom. His first thought, it must be confessed, was: "Och but I'm the dunderhead. If I'd had a ha'porth of sinse, I'd ha' brought her one wid ne'er a flower, and she'd ha' consaited it had fell off nathural while she was away, and niver ha' doubted 'twas anythin' except the rael crame-colour." But aloud he said: "Sure, no matter for that, man. I'll bring her over another from our place; we've oodles of them. And since there's nothin' happint you, a red one 'll do her all as well—I mane—isn't that the car I hear comin'?"

"Ay is it," said Bob, "and bedad now, they're laughin' hearty enough. It's not dis-thressin' themselves greatly they are, Tommy, if they're after killin' me."

“Och, but they can't ha' heard anythin' about it, that's a sure five,” said Tommy, who was prone to take a solemn and sentimental view of things, “or else they wouldn't ever be that unfeelin'!”

Tommy was as good as his word, and better. That very afternoon he stepped over to Mrs Kelly's with a vivid scarlet cactus, and another out of blow, which she did not guess to be her own, warily deprived of the blossom for whose hue Tommy might have found it embarrassing to account. Neither did she suspect that the little pot of fragrant golden-starred musk was regarded by him as an expiatory offering for a wrong committed against her. But it delighted her so highly that she would not hear of his departing without the most elaborate refreshments she could prepare, and the tale of the cream-coloured cactus ends literally like many an ancient folk-story :

*“ So they put on the kettle, and made tay,  
And if they didn't live happy, that we may.”*

## A FORMIDABLE RIVAL.

WHILE introducing myself as the dispensary doctor at Rathbawn, County Sligo, I must beg the fashionable reader to forbear his scorn of this humble social position until he has learned the extenuating circumstance that I am distantly related to the Ballyduffs of Rathbawn Castle, and have long been on somewhat intimate terms with my contemporary, Lord Ballyduff—a fact which I mention, however, not so much from pride as because but for it the following events might never have occurred. These took place during one autumn, when the Valentine Barrys came to the castle for the first time since their marriage, which had caused a quarrel, lately made up, between Valentine and his father. Their coming much enlivened the gloomy old house where Lord Ballyduff had lived quite alone, his other son being settled in England.

They were nice young folks, rather unpractical and unenergetic, and in some ways curiously boyish and girlish for a couple of five years' standing. In fact, Mac, their only child, was far the most formidable person of the three, taking life *au grand sérieux*, as people do at the age of four, not yet having discovered that intermediate state between sleeping and waking and liking and hating in which they afterwards spend so much of their time. There is no such word as indifference in a child's vocabulary. Mac was at this period both old-fashioned and original, his one great ambition being to maintain on all occasions what he considered a dignified and decorous demeanour—an ambition which really had the effect of a stern self-discipline, counterbalancing the spoiling process carried on passively by his parents, and more actively by his grandfather and an ancient family nurse. He tried so very hard to do all that, in his opinion, might become a man, that his inevitable childish lapses and failures were quaint and almost pathetic to witness. This turn of mind made him rather huffy and stand-off in his manner to



possibly derisive strangers, but my wife and I found favour in his sight, and, as our house is close to the castle gate, he frequently honoured us with a call, particularly after the arrival on a visit of our nieces, Amy and Beatrice Longfield—an event which, as will be seen, was a tolerably immediate consequence of his own presence at Rathbawn.

The Longfield girls were the orphan daughters of my brother Dick, and were afflicted with a step-mother, though not, upon the whole, in an aggravated form, as matters had been complicated by no second family, and Mrs Longfield was really fond of the sisters, and kind to them according to her lights, which, however, were not very brilliant. But it was unlucky that her solicitude for their welfare should have taken the shape of an ardent and singularly undisguised desire to see them what she called “settled.” This desire, which she sought to fulfil by such clumsy and transparent devices as made her proceedings a sort of burlesque of those adopted by more expert manœuvrers, sprang from no selfish motive or wish to get

rid of her charge, the fact that a large portion of their income would die with her being, I imagine, the main root of her anxiety; and, after all, hundreds of girls would have been quite ready to second her most strenuous efforts. My nieces, however, took a different view of things, and I have reason to believe that they thwarted and rebelled against her best-laid plans in a way which only a fund of genuine good-humour could have borne without exhaustion. Thus it came to pass that all our invitations to Alpha and Beta, as the girls were commonly called, had hitherto met with a firm refusal, the want of "opportunities" at a dull little country place like Rathbawn being frankly alleged as a reason of which nobody could fail to see the force.

But now, when a week or so after Mac's appearance at the Castle, business having brought me to Dublin, I called upon my sister-in-law in her quarters at a fashionable sea-side resort, and in the course of the visit hinted, though entertaining few hopes of success, that I should much like to bring my nieces home

with me, Mrs Longfield, to my surprise, after her first instinctive impulse to refuse as usual, seemed favourably disposed towards the suggestion.

“Carry off the girls to Rathbawn? I’m sure it’s very kind of you and Louisa, but I don’t really know. . . . It must be very nice for you to have the Valentine-Barrys at the Castle. I suppose they make it quite gay, and no doubt they will have people staying there. Of course, as you are a family connection, you see a great deal of them? . . . Alpha hasn’t been looking so well as I could wish lately, and I daresay change of air would be good for her. . . . Did you say that they had a grown-up son? Somebody told me that old Lord Ballyduff has heaps of money that he can leave to anyone he likes. . . . I really don’t think there will be much more going on here; the season seems to be quite over, and Mr Saunders is going to Scotland on Thursday, so they would lose nothing that way. . . . I’m sure, Denis, the girls will be delighted. They must see about evening dress, though, if they

are to dine at the Castle. You'll enjoy a visit to your Uncle Denis, won't you, girls?"

"It seems to me that it's to the Ballyduffs," said Beta with sarcasm, "but I suppose we can bring our minds down to him—as a preliminary."

A few days later, accordingly, we started for Sligo. Mrs Longfield saw us off with much kindly fuss, indulging to the last moment in hopeful speculations and prognostications, which were quite unchecked by Alpha's unresponsiveness and Beta's outspoken snubs, and which I, you may be sure, was careful not to discourage.

"By the way, Denis," she said suddenly, as the trunks were being put on the cab. "I don't believe I ever asked you what you thought about the girls' names—"Alpha" and "Beta," you know? Several people have told me they think them so pretty and uncommon, that I really have some idea of having them printed in full on our next set of visiting cards, only I can't quite make up my mind how they would look."

"Nonsense!" said Beta: "they merely look

as if we grew in such herds that we had to be labelled alphabetically. Depend upon it, any one who saw them would imagine at least a dozen Miss Longfields."

"Dear me," said her stepmother in disconcerted tones, "I never thought of that, but now that you mention it I think it's quite possible. I do remember some story about a man who had a heap of daughters, and called them Septima and Decima, and so on. Perhaps it would be better to give up using them. Do you think you could make a beginning while you are away? I could always write 'My dear Beatrice,' you know."

"Oh, never mind," said Alpha, kissing her with a sort of affectionate exasperation. "We can always take care to explain that there are not any more of us."

"My love to Louisa," called Mrs Longfield shrilly as the cab drove away; "and I'll let you know at once when Mr Saunders comes back." Whereat Beta put up the window on her side with a resentful jerk.

Mr Saunders was a junior partner in a

flourishing brewery firm, and had evidently been the bane of Beta's life throughout the past summer, availing himself of Mrs Longfield's zealous co-operation to persistently inflict his society and attentions upon her without bringing matters to a crisis by any definite declaration. This I gathered from Beta one day when she and I took a long walk, in the course of which I learned many particulars respecting the manner of life imposed upon her by her stepmother's designs, and described by her with some humourous chagrin. "It's worse for me than for Alpha at present," she said in conclusion, "as I believe mamma is really beginning to despair about her, and lets her alone more. She is nearly twenty-three, you know—four years older than I am."

"I suppose it is her venerable age that makes her so quiet and sedate," I observed.

"Oh, Alpha is quiet by nature; she has always been just the same, I believe," said Beta, "though, having been so long away at that French school, I haven't seen very much of her until within the last year or two. Sometimes

I would like to shake her a little, but then sometimes I fancy it may be because she isn't very strong. However, I think she has been livelier since we came here. Mac amuses her."

The sisters were not at all like one another. Alpha, tall and fair, was the better-looking of the two, but so exceedingly silent and apathetic that when you had called her gentle and ladylike you had very nearly summed up the range of the impressions which she produced on those around her. I say nearly, because there was still something scarcely definable in her, now and then coming to the surface in a witty saying or arch look, which seemed to betoken the existence of latent spirit and fun, held in abeyance by the torpedo-like spell of languor and absent-mindedness. Beta, on the contrary, was a small, dark, vivacious person, not exactly pretty, but pleasant and popular, and blessed with a keen sense of the ridiculous. Altogether, one might have thought her likely to prove a more congenial child's companion than her sister; but this was not so in the

case of little Mac Barry, who from the first showed a marked preference for Alpha. I have often noticed, indeed, that children who are at all precocious incline to shrink from the jocularity of their elders, despising it when it takes the imbecile form deemed suitable to the infant mind, and dreading it when its subject is incomprehensible enough to leave room for mortifying suspicions. Doubtless, therefore, it was Alpha's gravity that attracted Mac. He liked well enough to romp with Beta, but it was to Alpha that he brought hot, tightly compressed bunches of the blossoms, chiefly dandelion and rag-weed, which he met with on his way from the Castle to the Grange; and it was her company that he sought when he went to play in the pine-grove at the back of our house, generally greeting offers of other society with plaintive requests not to "bovver," and intentionally audible asides about the hardship of never being left in peace for a single instant. A small stream ran through the grove, and in those fine autumn days Alpha's grey gown and little fur cape might often be seen on its needle-



strewn bank, as she sat with a book between the roots of an old tree, while Mac dabbled blissfully close by beneath the brim of a straw hat many sizes too large for him.

This had gone on for about a fortnight, when one morning I was accosted by Beta in high glee with an open letter in her hand. "Oh, Uncle Denis, I've had such a delicious letter from mamma," she said, laughing. "When I wrote to her last I must have said something about Alpha and Mac, for she has evidently taken it into her head that he is grown up and highly eligible; so I needn't say that she is in great delight. It's rather disgusting, of course, but it's very amusing and, as it happens, very convenient just now, for that detestable Mr Saunders will be coming back directly, and I know that mamma would thereupon want to drag us home immediately, if she had not some other reason for keeping us here. My word, Uncle Denis, what a letter I will concoct to-morrow! She shall have mentally ordered the trousseau before she has read it through. It's lucky that I

am the one who always writes, for Alpha, who is frightfully conscientious, might think it wrong. As it is, I am sure that I will be able to keep mamma's mind quite at rest for as long as ever you will let us stay."

On the next morning, accordingly, Miss Beta did concoct a letter, upon which she prided herself not a little, and the progress of which she triumphantly reported to me, as I chanced to be the only person present during its composition.

"I am managing splendidly," she said, "and really without inventing anything. It comes in quite naturally—like this:" (reading) "'I am glad you get such nice flowers from Spenville. Mac Barry brought Alpha some beautiful ones yesterday, as he often does' (they really were remarkably fine dandelions). 'I am sure she would send you her love only that she went out with Mac after breakfast' (of course there is no occasion to mention that he was going to sail some paper boats which she had made for him in the stream), 'and has not yet returned.'" At last, laying down her pen,

she exclaimed joyfully: "There, that's done. I wanted to put in something that would prevent her from making any allusions when she writes, as Alpha sometimes reads her letters, and I think this postscript ought to do: 'You had better say nothing about this when you write, as Alpha might not like it' (I'm pretty sure that she wouldn't, but it's her own fault for being so lazy as to leave all the correspondence to me), 'and if any gossip came to Mac's ears, I do not know how he might take it, for, to tell the truth, I think he is rather easily affronted.' That's true, at any rate; why, only yesterday he called me a detestable idiot, and said that he would like to knock my hideous head off, because I pretended to think that he was afraid of Corkscrew's kitten. It would be charming to have so refreshingly candid and outspoken a brother-in-law."

The above communication apparently had a satisfactory result. At least Beta told me that Mrs Longfield's next letter was "tolerably discreet for mamma," containing only a

few mysterious sentences, while, even when reporting the imminent return of Mr Saunders, it strongly urged the advisability of the girls remaining at Rathbawn. Here Alpha came into the room, and Beta changed the subject, addressing her sister: "Mamma says in her letter that the other day a Captain Falconer called, whom you saw a good deal of in Wicklow four or five years ago, before I left school. He has just come back from India, having got some appointment. She says, 'I was out when he called, but afterwards met him on the pier. He has grown much older-looking. He asked after Alpha, and I told him she had gone to the West, *where she might probably remain a long time.*'" A discontented pucker in Beta's brow made me feel sure that Mrs Longfield had underlined the last words, and, from my own knowledge of my sister-in-law's capacity for keeping her thoughts to herself, I augured that Captain Falconer had most likely received some broad hints touching Alpha's brilliant prospects. Alpha meanwhile had been gazing intently

through the window, and she now held out her hand for the letter without looking round. She was a very long time in reading it, and afterwards seemed, I fancied, more dreamy and distrait than usual—from perplexity, perhaps, at the ambiguities of which Beta had spoken.

One afternoon, a few days later, I was hastening home from a long round, in hopes of escaping a threatened downpour, the first large drops of which had already begun to plump around me, when, not far from our gate, I met Mac stumping along quite alone with a portentously solemn expression, and carrying an enormous prayer-book.

“Hallo, Mac!” I said, pulling up, surprised at seeing him on the road unattended. “Where are you off to?”

“To church,” said Mac, in an elaborately matter-of-course manner.

I may remark that public worship still had for him the charm of a very new experience.

“To church, Mac? Why, this is only Thursday.”

"Of course it's Thursday" (with an air of tolerant contempt), "but isn't there a spechical service at five o'clock for Christian young men? Wasn't it gaved out on Sunday evenin'? B'lieve you heard it yourself."

"Well, but look here, Mac," in a tone which I intended to be impressive, "I'm sure you have come out without leave; they'd never have let you set off all alone, and on such a wet day too." I might have added that he was by no means in church-going trim, his clothes shewing marked traces of a recent paddling in the burn. Upon recognising a tone of remonstrance, Mac immediately planted his feet improbably wide apart, and clutched his big book more firmly.

"I declare to goodness," he began, with shrill volubility, "it's a poor case that people can never stop bovvering me. S'pose now I mayn't even go to church in peace, when there's a spech—"

But at this moment there came a sudden flurry of rain, accompanied by a violent gust of wind, which went whillaballooing through

the branches, and unceremoniously snatched off the Christian young man's broad-brimmed hat as it passed. He, in trying to retain his headgear, let his new prayer-book drop face downwards into a puddle, thereby splashing himself considerably with muddy water — a concatenation of disasters which so dashed his spirits that he was easily persuaded to get on the car and drive home with me, while I sent on a passing gossoon to the Castle with news of his whereabouts.

In the little back drawing-room at home a cheerful turf fire was glowing, before which Mac established himself, and, made drowsy by the warmth after the chilly damp out of doors, presently fell fast asleep on the rug, with his prayer-book, open at the Communion Service, which had suffered most severely from the immersion, set upon the fender-stool to dry. We had not been long there, and I was beginning to feel rather sleepy myself, when I was roused by the announcement of a visitor, a Captain Falconer, whose name somehow seemed familiar to me, though in what con-

nection I could not at first remember. Through the half-open folding-doors I could see that he was tall, thin, and apparently about thirty-five, with a much sun-burnt face, and dark hair already beginning to grizzle: plain, I thought, but pleasant-looking. Despite this qualified approval of the new-comer, however, I am ashamed to say, that sloth prevailed over the promptings of hospitality, and induced me to remain *perdu* in my comfortable corner, leaving my wife, who had been alone in the front room, to receive the stranger and sustain the burden of making conversation. This promised to be an uphill task, as Captain Falconer was manifestly embarrassed, and stammered nervously in explaining the reason of his visit. Happening to be in the neighbourhood, he said, he had ventured to call, as he had the pleasure of Miss Longfield's acquaintance, and her mother had mentioned that she was at the Grange. He was staying in the village at the Eglinton Arms—a delectable sojourn, I thought to myself, judging by the exterior of that grimy hostelry—having run down from Dublin in hopes of



—of some shooting—no, he meant of some salmon-fishing.

“It’s rather too late for that, is it not?” observed my wife.

“Oh yes, certainly, quite too late,” he answered, with the exaggerated emphasis which people are apt to use in assenting to a proposition the terms of which they have failed to catch; and I could see that his attention was completely distracted by the sound of a footstep then approaching the door. It was Beta who entered, evidently not surmising the arrival of the stranger, who I hope may not have perceived so plainly as I did how gladly she would have dispensed with his presence. After a minute or two she slipped into the back room, and, under cover of five-o’clock teacups, which were clattering close by, she whispered to me her wishes that our visitor would speedily depart. “For,” said she, “I have all manner of things to do to my blue grenadine”—there was to be a small dance at the Castle that night—“and I wanted Aunt Louie to help me. I think I might, at any

rate, go and send Alpha down: he's her acquaintance, you know, not mine; and, besides that, I dare say he wouldn't stay long if she came, for she generally won't take the trouble to talk much to people."

So saying, she stole noiselessly away. But as she went out at one door Alpha entered at the other.

"I have come for Mac's flowers," she began. "I think I left what he brought me this morning on the table, and if——"

She broke off with a violent start, which her quick recovery and composed greeting could not altogether conceal, but which it was easier to account for than to understand why Captain Falconer's countenance, perceptibly brightened up at her appearance, should have clouded over as unmistakably when she announced her errand. Her coming did but little to brush the surface of the languidly flowing discourse, which continued to trickle on feebly and intermittently, especially after my wife had been called away by a mysterious message from the cook, leaving her niece and Captain Falconer alone together.

Their conversation proceeded somewhat in this fashion—

“What a warm summer we have had! But I’m afraid the fine weather has quite broken up.”

“I’m afraid so. This is a most disagreeable day out of doors—so showery and windy.”

“I’m sure it is; but I was only out for a few minutes early this morning with Mac Barry.”  
(A pause.)

“I suppose this is a very quiet place? There seem to be so few houses about it that you can’t have many neighbours.”

“Very quiet indeed. We very seldom have a visitor except Mac; we see a great deal of him.”

“Oh. So I supposed from what Mrs Longfield said.”

“He’s a particular favourite of my aunt’s. She will miss him dreadfully when he goes.”

“Very fortunate for him” (grimly. Then rather eagerly): “Is he going soon?”

“Oh, I don’t think so; most likely about the same time that we do.” (A longer pause.)

“Shall you make any stay in this part of the world, Captain Falconer?”

"I don't exactly know, Miss Longfield. I've been offered a good appointment in England, but I'm not sure that I would care to take it. The chances are that I shall be off to the East again for the winter."

Here Alpha drew towards her a piece of crimson woolwork, I will not say with the express purpose of dropping its appended ball under the table and stooping to pick it up. I merely state that she did so immediately.

"You will excuse my going on with my knitting," she said. "I want to have this comforter finished by next week, in time for Mac's birthday."

"Oh, indeed," followed by a shockingly long silence, during which Captain Falconer, absently fiddling with a little bunch of weedy and withered flowers lying on the table near him, inadvertently brushed some of them over the edge. Whereupon, "Those are Mac's flowers," said Alpha, thankfully grasping at any straw of incident as material for remark. "I had intended to put them in water."

"I must apologise for maltreating so valuable

a possession as 'Mac's flowers,'” said Captain Falconer sarcastically, picking up two dead daisies and a dandelion, and replacing them on the table with ostentatious care.

“Mr Macartney Barry’s,” said Alpha, laughing nervously, and clinging to the subject from the instinct that leads people to talk about children and animals when ill at ease. “You don’t know what a dignified person he is, or you wouldn’t speak of him so unceremoniously.”

“Oh, I can assure you that I haven’t the slightest wish to wound Mr Barry’s feelings by any undue familiarity on my part,” he replied, so very stiffly and sulkily that I should not have imagined him to be in earnest, if I had not seen his face. As for Alpha, I believe she was not at that moment sufficiently collected to notice the reception of her little joke. Her hands trembled among her bright wools, and her colour was coming and going in a way that was pretty enough, but which betokened a perilous strain on her self-possession. Perhaps she was conscious of this, for she went on hurriedly:—

“I rather fancied that I heard his voice in the

hall a little while ago, and if he came in then it must have been in the middle of that tremendously heavy shower. If you will excuse me for a minute I would like to see."

"Pray don't let me detain you," said Captain Falconer, rising abruptly. "Indeed, I have already stayed an unconscionable time—no doubt you have an engagement."

"Oh, no, indeed I have not," said Alpha, rising too, and now, evidently struck by his strange manner, "It is only that Mac takes cold rather easily, and if he sits in his wet shoes——"

"Oh, certainly, certainly; I quite understand," he began, but stopped short, interrupted by a sound which penetrated from the inner room. It was that of a voice saying murmurously and low: "Bovveration—it's too bad—they aren't a bit wet. I'll not change them." Mac, in fact, had wakened just in time to overhear Alpha's last words, and, somewhat to my consternation, seemed disposed to resent them deeply.

"They're perfitley dry, so they are. 'Clare

it's plague, plague, plague from morin' to night. S'pose you think one has nuffin to do but change one's boots every minute when one didn't walk into a single puddle—can tell you I won't."

These remarks, begun in a drowsily defiant croak, rose in a shrill crescendo, and, as they ended, a small figure appeared between the folding-doors, and stood blinking its dark-blue eyes irately into the lamp-lit room.

"Why, Mac," said Alpha, "I never knew you were in there."

"They're as dry as boneses," pursued Mac, not to be diverted from his grievance, and protruding a muddy boot-tip. "Wish to goodness people would sometimes mind their own business. Can't you ever let me be?" Wherewith he retreated triumphant, and betook himself to his rug.

"So that's Mac," said Captain Falconer, excitedly ; "not the Mac Barry, surely, that you were speaking of just now, and that your mother told me so much about?"

"He's the only Mac Barry I ever heard of,"

said Alpha, looking much puzzled at his astonishment. Then, as he continued to ejaculate, "Is it possible?" she added, "What is there so wonderful in that? Why on earth shouldn't he be?"

"I don't know," he stammered, "I must have made a mistake somehow. But your mother—I understood her to say that he was in the army."

"What can mamma have been thinking of?" said Alpha. "Of course, she never saw him; but it sounds too absurd—in the army! A child not four years old!"

The position of an eavesdropper is never an intrinsically honourable one, though it may sometimes be thrust upon a man by circumstances which absolve him from blame. No circumstances, however, can compel him to reveal what thus comes to his ears, and there are some occasions upon which his doing so should be regarded by all right-minded people as an unpardonable sin, for which reason I will not here record any of the observations made by Captain Falconer and my niece Alpha during the



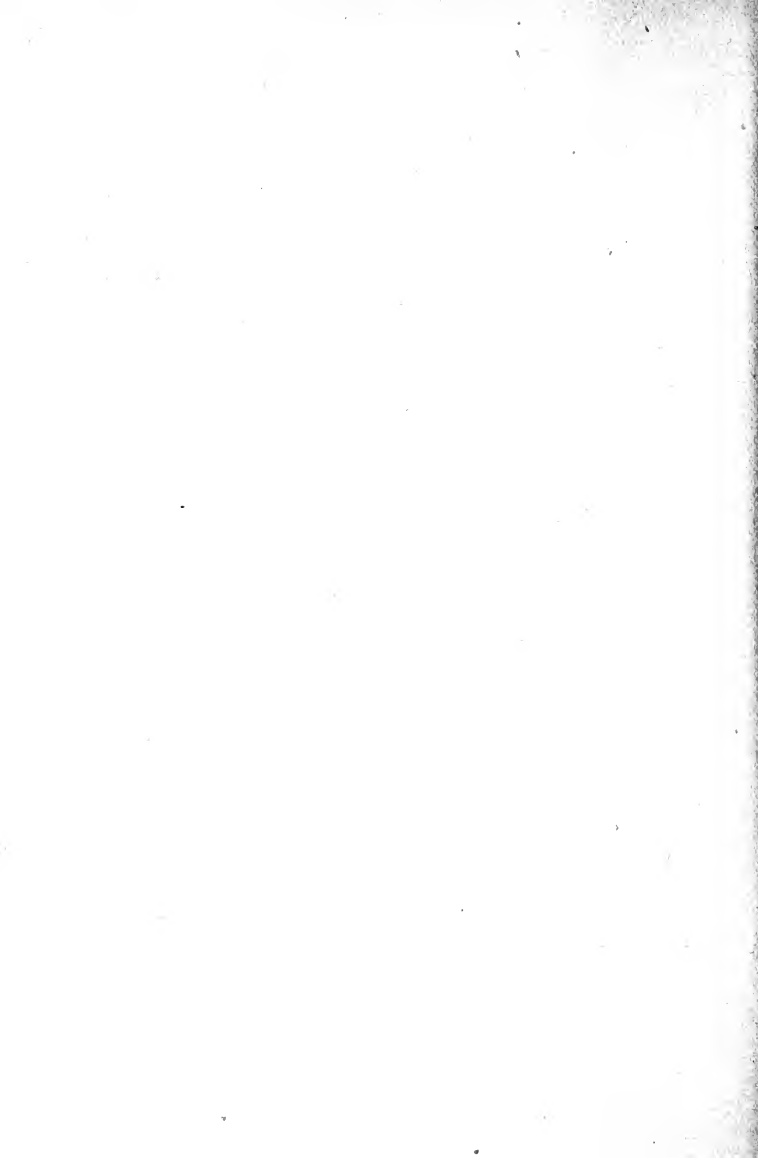
few minutes which elapsed before I thought it expedient stealthily to effect my exit. But when, a good while afterwards, Captain Falconer having at length departed, and all my women-kind being deep in confabulation upstairs, I went to fetch Mac to his tea, I could not forbear saying to him in an aimless sort of semi-soliloquy: "Well, Mac, it seems that you have been the hero of a small tragi-comedy"—a remark which Mac apparently considered to be of an opprobrious nature, for, condescending to a *tu quoque*, a thing he would not have done had he been wide awake, he retorted sleepily, "So're you."

## A YEAR AND A DAY.

AMONG the fields north-westward of Ballyhoy there is a rather intricate tangle of by-roads, wherein a stranger may easily lose his bearings, as I had done one late summer evening, when I luckily fell in with an old acquaintance, Dan Joyce, the Kildrum letter-carrier. Dan, who was returning from a round, escorted me to a place where four ways are knotted together, and where, on a green triangle of sward, stands a wide old cottage with many thatched gables as quaint in contour as a broad-brimmed last-century hat. Its little peaked windows are almost eclipsed by the spreading eaves, and at highest noon its hearth-fire burns in a dusk which makes the flame, glimpsing through the open door, look strong and ruddy. While Dan was pointing me my road, a woman passed out of that dark door, and came close to us, a small figure with head and shoulders so muffled



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in a heavy woollen shawl that you could not tell at first sight whether she were old or young. But the rough grey terrier, which rose up from the threshold to follow her, was obviously very ancient, bestirring himself as a duty, not as a pleasure, which argues great age in a dog. She gazed intently up and down each empty white track, but was slowest to withdraw her eyes from the eastward lane, which joins the Town road. Her very shadow, stretching far over its dust, seemed to suggest a projected wish. When, after a few minutes, she turned lingeringly away, she would have gone indoors without noticing us, if Dan had not said, "Good evenin' to you, Mary, and how's yourself this long time?"

"Why, it's you — Dan — Dan Joyce," she said, groping to his identity with a palpable effort of recollection; "I thought to meself I heard somethin' comin' this way, but I didn't expect it would be anythin' at all yet a bit."

"Well, it's only the two of us, and we're no great things, sure enough," said Dan; "I haven't seen a sight of you for one while."

"I don't be lookin' out very often," she said, "and in course I wouldn't go anywheres to-day, be raison of this bein' the *Day*, you know. For I keep tellin' the rest of thim 'twould be an unhandy thing if there was nobody in the house when he landed home—wouldn't it now? They're all of thim off wid themselves — I disremimber where to they said — but they'll be in prisintly, for I'm thinkin' it's got late this time, fine and late. To be sure, Michael isn't the same thing to them and me, not be no manner of manes," she said with a certain inflection of pride in her rather mournful voice, "maybe they'll all come in together."

"Ay sure, Mary, they'll be home in next to no time," said Dan, and he added in an encouraging tone: "there's th' ould sun settin' as fast as he can contrive."

"Would you say he raelly was?" said Mary, turning to him anxiously. Her eyes made a sort of glow-worm shining in the shadow of her dull grey shawl. "You wouldn't think he was just lettin' on under a cloud for a minit?"

One might have supposed Dan's statement sufficiently borne out by the fact that straight before her a vista of leaf-latticed lane ended in the dazzle of a great fiery gold disc, against which the curved edge of a dark-clodded lea land was tilting up steadily.

"We're gettin' such quare weather entirely to-day," she went on, casting a dissatisfied glance round the moteless evening blue. "Every now and agin it darkens over till you'd be fit to declare the sun was gone down wid himself if ever he did in his life before. But, bedad, the next time I might look out and listen, there he'll be shinin' up over your head the height of the world, bright enough to blind the eyes of you, and ne'er a sign of settin' on him at all. Some whiles I feel to hate the sight of the whole of it, may goodness forgive me; for sure there's nothin' to hinder Mick of comin' be daylight, on'y somehow it seems liker in me mind that 'twill be late in the evenin'. 'Deed, if I wasn't after bein' mistook that way afore now, I'd say it must be middlin' late at all events. But then I've seen it look that black

and white outside, I've thought for sartin there was moonlight and stars in it, and a quare fright I've got wid the notion that be some odd chance he hadn't ever come, till I remimbered it was the *Day* all the time, and they couldn't be anythin' except clouds passin' over. A won'erful long day it is as ever I remimber—isn't it, Dan?"

"It's the natur of some days to be slow passin' by," said Dan, "the same as it's the natur of some horses to walk aisy. And, for that matter, the heavier they're loaded, the aisier they'll walk, and be hanged to it."

"And the *Day's* a right to be long anyway," Mary said more cheerfully, "for it didn't want a week of midsummer when he went." 'Twas a contrary thing enough for him to be took off that way to Manchester, and we only keepin' company since Easter. A bit down the road there he bid me good-bye, and sez he to me: 'If I'm not back for you in a year and a day, you may be givin' me up.' A year and a day, that was what he said as plain as he could spake, and so I told them. I daresay you heard tell of it, Dan. Do you mind?"



"Oh, I mind, I mind. And you'd a notion a year was a great while."

"I had so. 'Deed I thought rael bad of it. But sure I was a fine fool, for the year went at the rate of a hunt; maybe it's that len'thens the Day be comparison. Why, lad, it was harvest before you could look round, and Christmas, and Spring. I'd ha' been gladder of the plisant weather comin,' only 'twas then they kep' me annoyed wid a story they had about some young rogue that run off to England away from his sweetheart, and took up wid another girl. Sick and tired I'd be hearin' them talk, and where was the sinse in it, I'd ax them, when, glory be to goodness, we'd nothin' to say to any such a villin? But I wonder of an odd while what's become of him."

"He might be dead and gone to his own place this long time back for aught I know," said Dan grimly.

"An' it only last Spring?" said Mary remonstrantly, "what 'ud ail a young man to be dyin' off that way? It isn't the biggest slieveens are in the greatest hurry to be quittin'."

"It is not, bedad. That's a very sinsible word of yours, Mary," said Dan.

"The saints may pity his sweetheart, whoever she is," said Mary, "and she as like as not lookin' out for him all this while, and wid no call to be wishin' the day's endin', the crathur, if she knew the way she was left."

"If I'd the hangin' of some people," said Dan, "I'd do it in a manner they wouldn't like."

Just then a small company of sunbonneted women and girls came along the lane, going home from their work in the fields. Some of them interrupted their own talk and laughter to call a fine evening to us as they passed. Their appearance seemed to somewhat alarm Mary. She glanced nervously towards her door when she saw them coming, and kept shrinkingly behind Dan until they had gone by. "Somehow there's a quare sight of strange people about to-day," she said then, looking after the group as it receded between the hedges, "I dunno the looks of them ones at all. None of them was Kate Brennan, though I thought it sounded a trifle like her voice."

“There’s two of them her daughters, and the others are just the Widdy Cleory and the young M’Cabes; very dacint people altogether. But strange lookin’ or no, there’s ne’er a one of thim ’ud be doin’ a hand’s turn of harm agin you, Mary,” said Dan reassuringly, “and if ever any tramps might happen to come streelin’ around while the rist of your folk were out, the ould dog here ’ud soon show all such that they’d better be steppin’ on, for he’s on-common stiff in his own promises.”

“Ay, he’s strange too,” she said, “I dunno where he come from, but I see him about continual. Belike he’s after losin’ himself; or may-be he might run home when it gets a bit darker.”

“I’m thinkin’ ould Matt won’t be apt to run very far out of this place, he that’s served his time in it, man and boy, a dozen year and more,” said Dan, patting the shaggy terrier, who stood by with an air as crestfallen as if he had been listening intelligently to that ungrateful repudiation. The rim of Peter Kelly’s broad Ten-acres at this instant cut off from us the last

segment of orbed golden blaze : but a flight of crows that passed overhead went flapping through warmly flushed air. They dwindled into quivering smuts before Mary said : "I'll be steppin' in wid me now." But after a pace or two, she faced round again, as if turned by some sudden thought. "D'you know, Dan," she said, "a while ago, when I was lookin' out at the gap there, thinkin' it was a step comin' up that way, I heard some people across the lane talkin' about an ould woman who'd been waitin' for somethin' to happen till she didn't know the differ between night and day—och, how could that be at all? Gone clane daft and demented they said she was. But I never heard tell of e'er such an ould mad body anywheres about here."

"No more didn't I," said Dan. "Plenty of folk's very ready to be callin' their neighbours names, and themselves not any great things for sinse, if they'd only believe it."

"Well, good evenin' to you, Dan," said Mary, "she's to be pitied, goodness knows, and the villin's sweetheart too. 'Deed, when I think of

the two of them, I've little to do to be frettin' meself, and I wid the year done yesterday, and just this day to put over, that's bound to come to an endin', if it was the len'th of everythin' that ever begun. Only when I'm cramped and stiff and could wid sittin' a long while indoors, I do be gettin' discouraged like now and agin. Bedad, a girl ought to have more wit. I'm goin' in now, but I'll hear him fast enough, no fear, wid the door a bit open. Sometimes they'll be shuttin' it, all I can do or say, howane'er I can make a shift to listen all the same. Ah, the crathur, whoever she is, I'm sorry at heart for her."

As Mary and the dog and their dim shadows moved towards the dark door, Dan took off his battered greenish-black caubeen and twirled it round with both hands, while his grey hair flickered in the breeze. "That's Mary Kinsella," he said, "Michael Garvey, the young thief of the world she has the talk about, run away from her—the divil catch him and keep him."

"Long ago?" I said.

“Forty-two year this summer we’ve come through. But the notion she’s got is that he’ll be back exact to the day he said—wid his lies. Nothin’ ’ill persuade her the sun could set till then—not if the Day of Judgment happint between times. Sure I’ve done me best meself to dispersuade her of it—she’s as sinsible as anybody berights—me best I’ve thried, and may God forgive me for the same. I’d a notion that if it was put out of her head, she might maybe turn her mind—but let that alone. She’s livin’ on here wid her sister’s son, Joe M’Auliffe and his wife, and they’re good to her—they’d best be. You’ll find your road home aisy now, straight along to Hanigan’s. I’ll just be dodgin’ about the lane here till I see some of them comin’ back to her. The crathur—inside there she is, foolin’ herself wid idees, as if she hadn’t eyes in her head. Ay sure, there’ll be but the one ould sunsettin’ for her in this world, day or night—and I haven’t the heart now to wish it was diff’rent.”

More than once I looked back, and saw Dan standing still at the parting of the ways. The

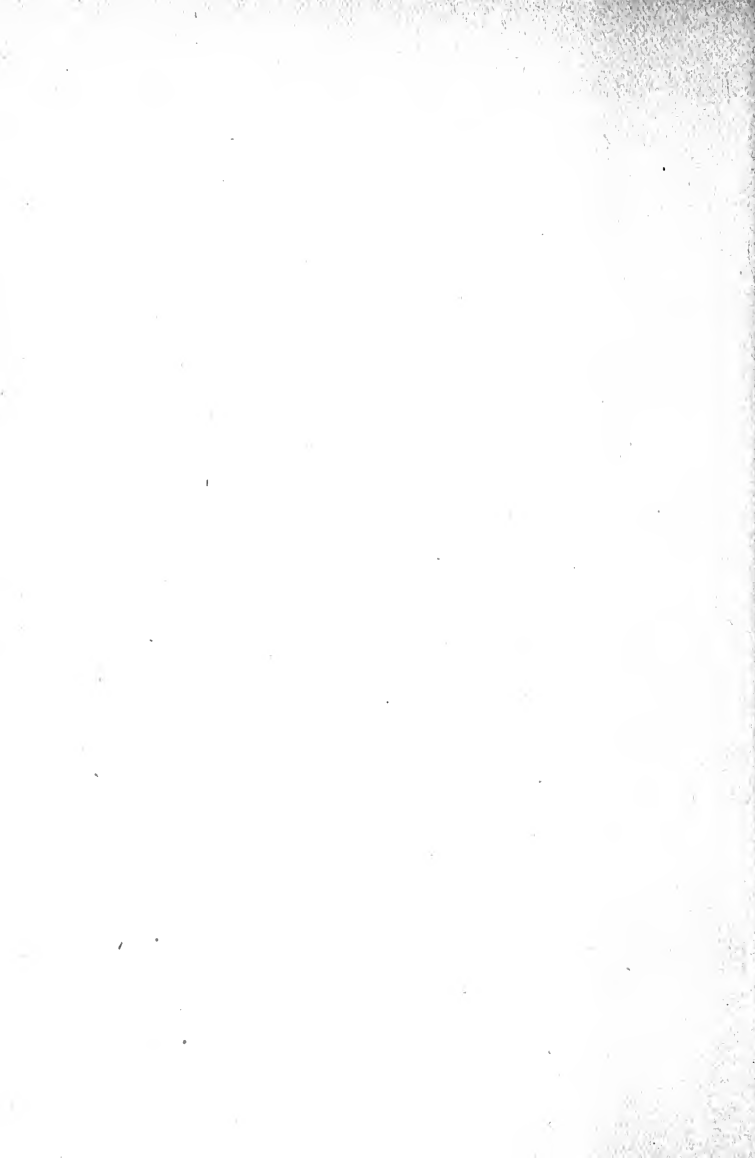
dry, white road with its green-sod border had begun to smell of dew, and the air came in cool wafts. But the few stars that had pricked out held scarcely more light in them yet than the pale blossoms glimmering along the hedge, and the moon, floating up behind deep-purple Ben Edair, might have been a petal fluttered from a brier-rose over-blown.

## MAC'S LUNCHEON.

DOWN by the sea last summer we—that is, Nannie and I—witnessed some scenes of a little drama which has since then often afforded us a topic of conversation. Portarne is a very small seaside place, about nine miles from a large town, so small, indeed, that passing trains do not think it worth their while to stop oftener than once or twice a day at the insignificant-looking shed of a station, and the inhabitant consequently feels himself to be in a more remote and inaccessible region than might have been expected, judging by the actual distance from the city. It is, however, just the quiet sort of nook that suits us, and among the hollows and slopes of the bent-grown sand-hillocks we could always find a comfortable place to sit in, sheltered from the sun and wind, and out of range of the damp sea-weed







and jelly-fish, which are such a drawback nearer high-water mark.

One fine afternoon, when we had been at Portarne for a week or two, we went down as usual to the beach with our novels and knitting. I remember that I had "Emma," and Nannie "Mansfield Park," both in the railway library series, but with their flaunting yellow covers concealed under sober brown paper, for the sake of example, since, as Nannie says, "though we, of course, would never choose anything objectionable, still, at a little distance, we might *look* as if we were reading Ouida, or worse." So we always hide our gaudy pasteboards discreetly, and feel a strange mixture of virtue and hypocrisy if we see any one glancing towards our volumes. We found a pleasant camping-ground not far from the mouth of the short deep-rutted lane that runs down between the sand-hills to the shore, and for some time we had it entirely to ourselves, barring the presence of a few sand-hoppers, who danced among the tufts of sea-holly and long spikes of bent. But after

a while a small form came to the entrance of our hollow, and squatted down full in our view. This was a child, a little boy seemingly between three and four years old, dressed in a faded brown-holland suit, which was so very pale that it had evidently gone through many washings in the tubs of a laundress who did not know how a handful of bran in the water keeps the colour to the last thread. He had fair glossy hair, not long, but growing in soft fluffs, half wave, half curl, and shrewd-looking dark blue eyes in a little round face, which was browned by the sun, as were also his small, well-shaped hands. He brought with him a large wooden spade, rather badly broken, and a round tin canister, which he was filling with the pebbles and shells that occasionally cropped up through the sand. This pursuit he carried on most industriously, only pausing now and then to rattle his treasures with an air of solemn satisfaction. Nannie is excessively fond of children, so, naturally enough, her thoughts at once turned towards our paper-bag of

biscuits, a compromise between sloth and greed, being intended to fill the void likely to be left by the absence of five o'clock tea, which we had determined to forego, as not worth the walk to and from our lodgings. She now extracted two biscuits, and offered them to the new-comer with her friendly smile, which generally inspires confidence in the youthful mind. But he glanced first at her and then at her proffered gift with an imperturbable though slightly bored air, as of one who meets with an interruption which must be civilly yet firmly put aside.

"Hate 'em, thanks," he said with deliberation and distinctness, and thereupon resumed his occupation of grubbing up a preternaturally large cockle.

"Ah, you like shells better than biscuits, I see," said Nannie, not to be repulsed, though somewhat disconcerted by the laconic decision of his refusal.

"'Spose so," he answered, without looking up.

"You wouldn't like them, though, for your dinner—come now, would you?" she went on

playfully—Nannie has such a way with children—but in reply to her little sally he only muttered a few words, which, as well as I could make out, sounded like “Bodder,” and “Wish to goodness.”

“They would feel very hard and gritty, wouldn't they?” she continued, sportively enlarging upon her idea, “and I think you would soon wish for some nice broth and soft bread instead of them.”

To this suggestion he made no direct reply whatever. Only after a short pause he gave a deep sigh, almost a gasp, and said, as if soliloquising, but in a loud, complaining tone, “‘Clare it's a poor case that no one can *ever* let me alone for a single minute!’”

Here was a snub too signal to be disregarded. Nannie retired, quite taken aback, to her seat, and her would-not-be acquaintance continued his employment in the unmolested tranquillity which he had succeeded in securing for himself. He was not destined, however, long to enjoy it without further interruption. Before many minutes had passed we heard an approaching

voice call "Mac, Mac!" and presently the caller appeared round the corner of the bank—a tall, slight slip of a girl, who looked about twenty, dressed, like the child, in faded holland, and with the same soft-hued hair, a few shades darker, and a face scarcely less sun-browned than his own. Having outgrown the spade-and-shell period, however, she carried a book in one hand and a shady hat in the other.

"Oh, there you are, Mac," she said as she came in sight of him. "I've been looking for you for some time. I didn't see which way you went."

Mac, who was sitting with his back to her, did not look round, but said, "Well, *I'm* not going home now, any way, so you may be off, old Lil."

"But see here," she said, standing still, and using an argumentative tone as if expostulating with a grown-up person, "I forgot to order dinner this morning; and if I don't go soon I suppose it will be too late to have anything cooked."

"*I dunno, I'm sure,*" responded Mac with chilling indifference.

"It wouldn't take long. You'd have plenty of time to finish when we come back," she said, "and I'd make as much haste as I could."

Mac preserved a stony silence. Then, as she was drawing nearer, he, still without looking up, flung a small shower of sand in her direction with his spade. Some of it went into her neatly buckled little shoes, and she at once began to retreat with a slightly crest-fallen and aggrieved air.

"I suppose Val is somewhere about," I heard her murmur to herself as she turned away, and I saw her glance up and down the beach before she went towards the lane.

Mac now moved a little nearer to us, attracted by the sight of several desirable pebbles, and Nannie could not forbear to seize so good an opportunity for a timely remonstrance.

"Don't you think, my dear," she said, "that you ought to go with your sister when she wants you?"

He looked at her with a scornful wonder.



"She isn't my sister," he said: "she's the 'misthress,' pronouncing the last word in a way which showed that he was accustomed to hear it spoken by some uncultivated person, presumably his nursery-maid. A sudden idea flashed across our minds. Nannie wondered, in a rather horrified whisper, "whether it was possible that that girlish-looking thing could be his mother." And, now that we thought of it, we remembered having heard that a young married couple had taken the red-brick house close by at the other end of the lane. We were still shaking our heads over the shocking laxness of discipline indicated by the child's mode of addressing his parent, when a third stranger appeared upon the scene. This was a tall young man in light grey, who, as far as we could see—for he had not come very near, and yet so near that we did not like to put on our spectacles—was dark and good-looking, and who certainly was smoking a cigar as he sauntered along. At sight of him Mac evinced more interest than he had hitherto condescended to display. He gathered up his spade and canister, and ran off in the direction

of the now-receding figure, which at last, finding that he did not gain upon it as rapidly as he could wish, he hailed imperiously with—

“’Top, Val. Can’t you wait for one? I’m a-comin’ with you.”

“Val,” we repeated to one another, and then, with a simultaneous groan, “his father.”

Val stopped as directed, and even retraced a few steps slowly.

“Oh, you Mac, be off!” he said in an injured sort of way, his tone being a less resolute and more melancholy edition of that used by Mac himself a few minutes before; “you aren’t coming with me, you know. You gabble so all the while that one can get no good of one’s smoke.”

Mac took no notice of this accusation, but proceeded to stuff his canister, for which he had no further use at present, into a convenient pocket of his friend’s coat, and then shouldered his large spade.

“I’m going a tremendous way,” said Val, indicating indefinite distances on the horizon

with a sweep of his arm. "You'll never be able to get so far."

But Mac merely remarked, "Come 'long;" and the pair departed, Mac achieving a length of stride truly wonderful, considering the dimensions of his legs; though at times a tendency to topple over compelled him to steady himself by abrupt clutches at his companion's coat, which somewhat marred the dignity of his progress.

Next day we learned who Mac and his belongings were; by which I do not mean that we simply learned their names, as when once the rector's wife had mentioned that they were the Honourable Mr and Mrs Valentine Barry, and that he was the youngest son of Lord Ballyduff, we immediately found ourselves in possession of several other facts in their history. For Valentine's mother had been an old school friend of ours, and we well remembered him, in the character of a fat, jolly baby, upon the visit which we had paid her not long before her early death. Since then we had seen little of the family, but

mutual friends had kept us duly conversant with the main course of their affairs. Thus we knew that Valentine and his father, upon the occasion of the former's marriage, which took place four or five years ago, when he had scarcely attained his majority, had quarrelled about some arrangements connected with the fortune inherited from his mother, and that the young people had always made their home with Mrs Barry's father, Mr Sinclair, who, however, a few months since had been ruined by some rash speculations, the crash involving almost all his son-in-law's possessions. The news of this catastrophe had, at the time, caused us considerable chagrin, for poor Maud's sake, especially as in view of the strained relations existing between Valentine and Lord Ballyduff, with whom our acquaintance was very slight, but who was by report a harsh and implacable-tempered man, the young couple seemed likely to be placed in unpleasantly straitened circumstances. Their appearance now in this unfashionable resort, and, as Nannie observed, evidently in last summer's clothes, might

be considered, we thought, to betoken limited means; and that impression had, I believe, something to do with our determination to lose no time in calling upon them, notwithstanding their reprehensible conduct in bringing up their child to order them about and address them by their Christian names.

Martello Lodge was a commonplace little villa residence, which had been run up on speculation when the railway station was opened at Portarne, and which had since that time been generally unoccupied except by the elderly charwoman, who was let with it as "an excellent plain cook." Still, having had some experience of the rents demanded for similar seaside dwellings, we said to one another, as we sat on cheap chairs in the shabby showily furnished drawing-room, while the maid looked for her mistress, that the Barrys could not be so very badly off after all, if they could afford to take a house like this. Mrs Barry presently appeared, accompanied by Mac, who shook hands with us with a preoccupied air, and immediately immersed himself in an old volume of *Punch*.

His mother was very pink with shyness through all her sun-brown, but soon grew very friendly through all her shyness when she found that we were such old acquaintances of her husband. As our conversation proceeded, I thought she seemed to be making up her mind to start some subject on her own account, which she had not hitherto ventured to do; but it was not until I was momentarily expecting Nannie's signal for departure that our hostess asked us timidly if we knew whether there were any lodgings to be had in the neighbourhood. "This house does quite well," she said, "only that seven pounds a month seems a good deal to pay just for rent when one has not more than a hundred a year, doesn't it?" she continued, looking appealingly at us. "You see, if it went on for long, there wouldn't be much left for anything else — and there are such a quantity of other things."

Considerably shocked and startled at this disclosure, which revealed a lamentable scantiness of resources, together with a reckless non-

adaptation of expenditure thereto, we confirmed her opinion so emphatically that she looked rather alarmed.

"You see," she said apologetically, "I never did any housekeeping before, as Mrs Sinclair arranged everything at home, and I don't know much about it, and neither does Val. But we settled this morning that it would be better to move at the end of our month."

Fortunately we had heard only that day that Mrs Dempsey's lodgers had left her. Mrs Dempsey's lodgings were a little way farther up the road towards Asterton, and, judging by the appearance of her lodgers, we concluded that her charges were not likely to be high. So it was arranged that we should next morning accompany Mrs Barry on a visit of inspection, since, as we afterwards remarked, it was most improbable that she would make a good bargain if left to conduct the negotiations alone.

Mac took very little notice of us during our stay, but that little was not, as might have been apprehended, of an unfriendly nature. I, chanc-

ing to sit near him, was on my guard against irritating him by any obtrusive advances, and once, having observed him glance several times from his book to me, and finally remark aloud :—

“The name of this pichter is so ’trociously badly pwinted that nobody could possibly read it who hadn’t got spectacles on.”

I had sufficient presence of mind to fall in with his views by availing myself of my equipment with those articles to read out, as if for my own satisfaction, the illegible inscription, the typography of which was, I must admit, in no way at fault ; whereupon he said, “Oh, that’s it, is it ?” in a nonchalant tone, and turned over another page. As for Valentine, he remained invisible. At least, as I am sure that he did not mean us to see him step hastily into the little side shrubbery, just before we came up to the door, he may be considered not to have put in an appearance.

By the end of the week the Barrys had moved into Mrs Dempsey’s lodgings, which was a relief to our minds, as the glaring disproportion



between house rent and income was thereby considerably diminished. They were thus also enabled to dispense with the services of their housemaid, who, Mrs Barry confided to me, they fancied was perhaps not strictly honest—a suspicion which I had the less difficulty in entertaining, when I heard that she had been hurriedly engaged in Dublin without any inquiries as to character.

After this the summer slipped by without our seeing much of our new acquaintances, who did not appear to be sociable young people. That is to say, though at incidental meetings they were always pleasant and friendly in manner, we fancied that they rather avoided than promoted these, and had a decided preference for their own company. This was, we feared, in part owing to the unsatisfactory state of their affairs. For as time went on we thought that the two elders began to wear a somewhat harassed and dejected look, and our surmise was strengthened by remarks which fell from Mac, who occasionally favoured us with a good deal of conversation when we met him on the sands. For

instance, one day, having pointed out to us the large holes which had appeared in the upper leathers of his small shoes, he went on to remark, "Lil says they're 'sgraceful, but we haven't got a shilling to spare, and she's given up gloves, and Val says it's a con—confounded nuisance being so tight." And another day, in reference to the same subject, which evidently was a serious grievance to him, because, as he complained, "stones and things pwicked into his stockings," he observed: "It's a bovver that Lil's losted her bwooches and bwacelets, for Val says we could have raised something for them. And" (solemnly) "we has our suspicions that that girl Lizzie ab—abstwacted some of them." Moreover, after a while we noticed that he no longer despised our hard wine biscuits, but would eat them with an avidity and eagerness which caused us to have misgivings as to the quantity and quality of the child's meals at home. So things went on until about the middle of September, when there were to be races at Baypoint, the next station to Portarne, three miles distant, or less, if you took the shortest way

along the sands. We saw by the newspaper that two of Lord Ballyduff's horses were to run—a circumstance which drew from us much mournful comment upon “the sums that man must be spending on his stables, when his own flesh and blood were positively almost in want of the necessaries of life!”

The morning after the races I went down to the shore alone, and took up a slightly elevated position upon a sunny bank, from which I commanded a view of the wide stretch of beach to either hand. I had not been there long when I saw Mac trot out of the lane, bearing his usual load of wooden spade and tin canister. His first proceeding was, however, an unusual one, for, pausing close by my sand-bank, he laid down his spade, and began with evident difficulty to extract something from his canister. This proved to be a large doubled-up slice of bread and butter, which his strong sense of propriety had probably hindered him from consuming on the road, and which, to judge by his haste, he now intended to make short work of. But before he had time to indent more than one

semicircle upon its smoothly spread surface, his attention was diverted by the arrival of a beautiful red setter, who came pattering noiselessly over the sands on his silken-fringed feet, and took his stand before Mac, swaying his feathery tail, and surveying him open-mouthed with a blandly expectant expression of countenance. Mac is fond of all manner of four-footed things, and I now heard him address the animal, whose head was almost on a level with his own, in patronising and encouraging accents.

“Poor little doggie!” he said. “Would he eat some bread-and-butter?” and, suiting the action to the word, he broke off a crumbly fragment, the extreme smallness of which was, I am sure—as is the case with so many of our charitable deeds—prescribed by his own urgent necessities rather than by his generous feeling, and proffered it to the gently smiling jaws before him. The manners of their owner were, however, lamentably unfinished, and he saw no reason why he should be bound to prefer the right hand to the left, especially when the latter obviously held the materials for so much more

satisfactory a mouthful. And the consequence was that the next moment there occurred a rapid snatch, an indignant squawk, and a hurried gulp, and Mac's ample slice had vanished for ever, while the cause of its disappearance resumed his expectant attitude, innocently blinking and licking his lips, and making wavering shadows on the sand with his swiftly vibrating tail.

"You nasty gweedy old thing," said Mac in high wrath, striking at the dog with his spade: "you knowed as well as I did that you weren't to have it all. 'Clare it's too bad that I can't even have my bit of food in peace."

At this moment the dog's master, an elderly gentleman, stern of aspect, and with a grizzled beard, whom I had for some time seen approaching from the direction of Baypoint, came up to the place, and, not being aware of the bread-and-butter transaction, naturally enough mistook the cause of Mac's perturbation.

"You needn't mind him, my man," he said reassuringly: "he's as quiet as a lamb—wouldn't touch anybody. Hi! Rufus, come here, old fellow!"

This was indeed adding insult to injury. Mac turned upon him with intense wrath.

"I'm not afraid of him any more than you are yourself," he said in a high, shrill voice; "but how'd you like it if he went and ate up every scrap of your lunching, and you starving with the hunger?" (Mac, we had been pained to observe, had, since his residence under Mrs Dempsey's roof, picked up some of her peculiar idioms.)

"I say, that's too bad," replied the stranger, in whose voice I fancied that I recognised something vaguely familiar; "but you don't live far off, I suppose. Couldn't you run home and get some more?"

"And where'd be the use of going home," said Mac, "when we couldn't 'ford to get more than one loaf yesterday, and it was all finished up at breakfast this morning, and there won't be no more till the baker-man comes this evening. And Val and Lil can't have *any* lunching: but the lodging-woman gave me a piece, and she said it was a poor case if a gentleman's son, let alone as she'd heard tell a nobleman's grand-

son, couldn't have a bit of bread when he wanted it. And now that nasty idiot" (aiming another blow at Rufus, who was still affably grinning) "has gone and swallowed it all up before I could stop him."

"Just tell me what's your name?" interposed the stranger abruptly, his grim smile of amusement suddenly vanishing.

Mac is rather proud of his name, which is long and not very easy to pronounce. He now replied, "Macartney Valentine O'Neill Barry," adding, "What's yours?" in a tone which evidently challenged competition.

His hearer, I regret to state, said, "The Devil!" Then, recollecting himself, he answered hurriedly: "My name? Oh, well, it's much the same as yours. Do you know where your father is? Look here, if you'll show me where you're staying, I think I can see about getting you some luncheon."

"All right; this way," answered Mac, and he preceded the other up the lane. But they apparently met some one before they had gone far, for a moment afterwards I heard

Val's voice exclaim, "The governor, by Jove!" thus confirming my suspicion that Mac had been making the acquaintance of his paternal grandfather.

I am glad to say that the upshot of this meeting was a complete reconciliation between the Valentine Barrys and Lord Ballyduff. He now makes his son a liberal allowance, and they seem to spend a good deal of their time with him at Rathbawn Castle. We conclude, therefore, that Mac at present enjoys holeless shoes and unstinted bread-and-butter, while we trust that under his grandfather's roof he may be less absurdly spoilt than he was when left entirely to the management of those misguided young people Valentine and Lily. I must confess, however, that this hope was somewhat dashed upon the last occasion when we saw anything of the child. It was a few days before they all left Portarne, and we met him posting along the beach in a great hurry.

"I'm going to meet Val's gov'nor," he said; "he's to bring me a new spade from Baypoint, 'cause I've losted my broken old one, and I see



him coming." And he ran on, calling, "Duffy, Duffy!"

But presently we heard his grandfather's gruff voice saying apologetically, and in a conscience-stricken tone, "Oh, upon my word, Mac, I declare I've forgotten the spade after all. I say, couldn't you dig a bit with my walking-stick? You could make rather fine holes with it, I should think."

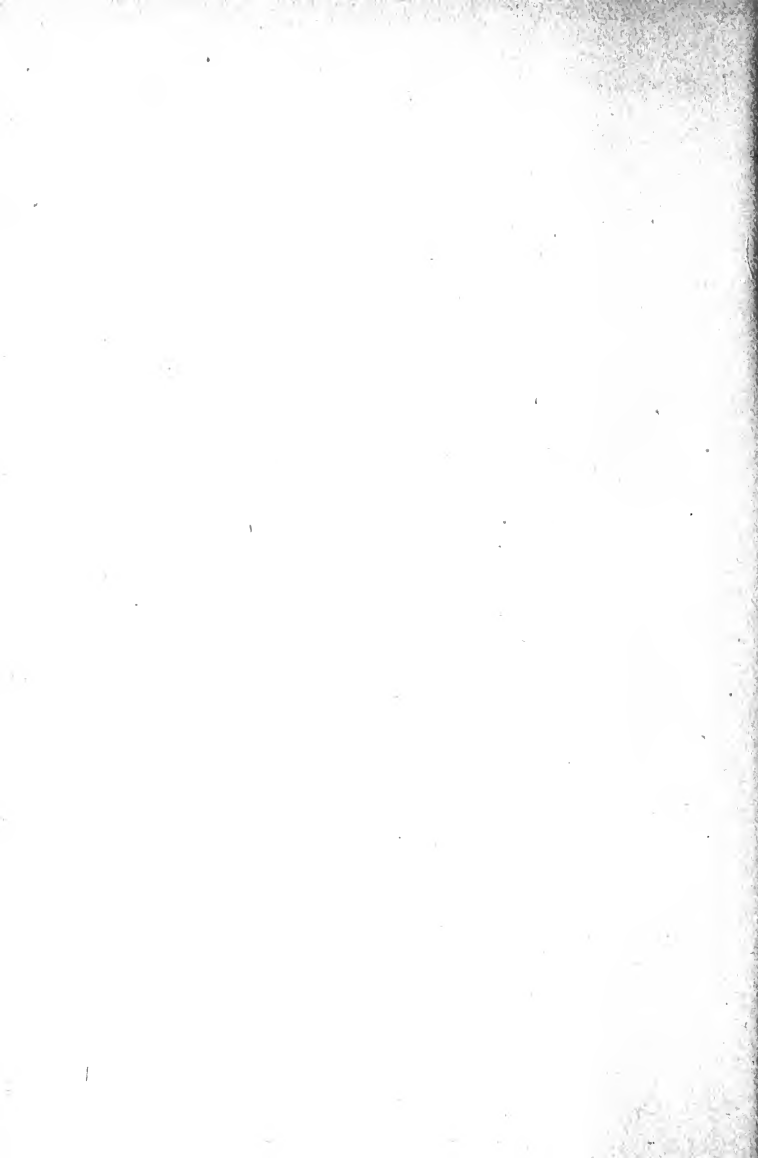
And Mac answered coldly, "Well, s'pose I can try—wonder you *like* to have such a bad membery."

## STOPPED BY SIGNAL.

CHRISTY SHEEHAN sat on the top of his loose-jointed stone wall in the August noon-shine, and looked at his patch of oats. The feathery ears, still green and fresh, had filled remarkably well, and the straw, with its dim golden under-glow, was surprisingly long, considering that the soil from which it shot up bore a hard-featured family resemblance to the adjacent belt of sea-weedy shingle. It was, in fact, a highly prosperous little crop, and a flight of light breezes passing over it made the soft seething rustle pleasant to a farmer's ear. Christy, however, did not apparently derive much gratification from it, for his expression was dissatisfied and downcast as he dropped himself off on the lane side of the wall, and began to walk homewards. He had not far to go, as his whitewashed, brown-eaved cabin was distant only the length of his "pitaty-drills," and they were short enough.



BERTHA NEWCOMBE



Moreover, gaps in the sturdy green rows, showing where daily forkfuls had been lifted, were already ominously frequent, when you remembered the month of the year. But they could be easily accounted for by a glance at the size of the party assembled in the cabin, where Christy's wife, Theresa, had just taken the steaming black pot off the fire, the main process in the dishing up of dinner. Besides themselves and their three small children, there were Christy's brothers, Felix, Mick, and Johnny, his sisters, Biddy and Rosanne, and Theresa's lame aunt, the Widdy Sally Dowdall.

It was an unfortunate circumstance that so many people should all have been more or less out of humour simultaneously, as the Sheehans undoubtedly were. Several signs betokened the fact. For instance, Mrs Christy as she moved about the hearth was singing to herself—

*“The leaves do fall,  
And so will we all”—*

a thing she never did except when put out. Then Felix kicked away Rory, the shaggy dust-

coloured terrier, who came and stood opposite to him expectantly grinning, and Rosanne sat down to her dinner without removing the scarlet cotton handkerchief which was tied under her chin. These, and other such trifles, were straws which showed that a moral east wind had set in beneath the Sheehans' thatch. The family preserved a glum silence during the meal, which was probably the most prudent course they could have adopted; it argued them, too, of a naturally peaceable disposition, as otherwise they would not have let the quarrel-fraught opportunity slip. Christy was the first to make any remark, and he said nothing until some time after he had peeled his last potato. Then he raised his eyes from the floor-hollow into which he had been blankly staring, and said abruptly—

“The crathur didn't like goin'.”

He addressed the observation to no one in particular, and it was followed by a pause, as if it did not call for comment. But at last Mrs Christy said, sententiously—

“People sometimes have got to do things they don't altogether like.”

"Ay, bedad, they have so," said the Widdy Dowdall.

"Oh, just now and agin—of an odd while," Felix said, ironically.

Christy glanced towards the corner occupied by Bidy and Johnny, as if he expected some criticism from that quarter, but neither of them spoke, and Johnny seemed to be drumming absently on the dresser.

"And sure why wouldn't they take their turn at keepin' him?" said the Widdy, in the tone of one resuming a familiar argument. "And they the same thing to him that yous are. 'Deed, now you've put yourselves about for the ould man beyond what anybody had a right to look for, I'm thinkin'. 'Tisn't as if he was your grandfather; that 'ud be a diffrent affair; but no more than his half-brother. People might be aisy enough ate out of house and home, if they were to go that far off. And it isn't as if it was a mother's sister aither; that's a dale nearer, let alone her bein' this long while crippled, and gettin' sixpence the pair at the stockin' knittin', and havin' oncom-

mon luck wid settin' chuckens. Troth, if it wasn't on'y for me, you'd niver have a clutch of eggs worth chippin' the shells off of," said the mother's sister, with an uneasy laugh. "But a grandfather's half-brother—it's next door to nothin' at all."

"Maybe he doesn't any better like bein' put out of the place he's lived his days in than if he was fifty grandfathers and ould aunts," said Rosanne, in a rapid murmuring mumble, looking black under her brilliant kerchief.

"Musha good gracious, girl alive, what talk is there of puttin' out in it at all?" remonstrated her sister-in-law. "I dunno how anythin' else 'ud be nathuraler, when Lizzy Denny, that's daughter to his niece, was agreeable to takin' him, and they ownin' a dacint little shop in Drumkillen, and wid on'y the one lad on them, and he earnin' wages this good while, so that they're well able to be at the expinse. Not but what herself 'll be apt to get the worth of his keep out of him; ay, will she. For she told me one day, afore there was e'er a notion of any such a thing, that it's fortins she had to be



spindin' in pinnies to brats of boys for carryin' her home parcels. And the Sunday she come here, she was sayin' there'd be plenty of errands he could be thrampin'. 'Tis won'erful the len'th of road he'll get over, when he can take his time to it, rheumatiz and all."

"Ah, sure, don't you mind how he legged it in to Cladavoyle and back for Dr Martin, in the snowy weather we had after Christmas, the night little Matty was took so bad?" said Biddy, suavely, as if she supposed herself to be adducing an acceptable corroborative instance, which she well knew, however, was not the case.

"And it's continted enough he was too wid it all, for the matter of that," averred Mrs Christy; "why yistherday I heard him romancin' away to the childer about what all he'd be bringin' them from the town, if ever he got to come to see us, as lively as an ould cricket. And times and agin he was sayin' he wouldn't stop in it to be a burthen on Christy and the whole of us be any manner of manes. So nobody need go for to be sayin' he wint agin his will. Contint he was."

"Ay, faix, rael sot up and plased he was over it," said the Widdy, who seldom did things by halves. "And why wouldn't he be? Goin' to a very dacint little place entirely; and the grand bundle you put up for him, wid his bit of food for thravellin'—no fear he'll get there hungry; and Christy, after lavin' his mornin's work, to thramp along wid him and meet the car. Sure Mick sted up till every hour last night dressin' an iligant big blackthorn stick for him—the crathur was in a dhrame of admiration over it; didn't you, Mick?"

"Blathers," said Mick, briefly.

Christy meanwhile had continued to send anxious glances towards his brother in the corner by the dresser, and he now enquired suddenly—

"What was that you said, Johnny?" But as Johnny replied with truth, "I wasn't sayin' anythin'," the small stratagem failed.

Christy rose, and stood looking out at the door. It opened straight on the beach's pavement of slippery shingle, where receding waves laid down long black parallel streaks of weed,

like tramway lines. In high tides these were wafted up very close to the threshold, and a seething foam-edge had been known to cross it, and come swimming over the dissolving floor amid much domestic discomfiture. But just now the water was low, quite a long way off among the dark-wigged boulders. The range of hills on the opposite shore of the narrow lough wore a clear deep purple, embroidered at the base with little squares of green and amber, beaded here and there with gleams of whitewashed cottage-walls. A few faint mist-flecks streaked dimly about the highest ridge, less substantial looking vapour than the knotted trail of steam that presently appeared as a train ran leisurely by, closely skirting the coast. Its hollow rumble over a bridge sounded across the water, and then a dying whistle.

“That ’ill be the twelve o’clock mail up,” said Felix, who was looking out over Christy’s shoulder; “she doesn’t stop at Knockroe.”

“Uncle Jim’s train does though, doesn’t it?” said Biddy. “But it isn’t due there this long while yit.”

"Och, no, not till three o'clock," said Mrs Christy, "and it can't be anywhere near that."

"Not much better than half-past twelve, I should say," estimated Felix, craning his neck to take an observation of the sun.

"There, she's after runnin' thro'," said Mick; "I can see the signal-arm fallin'."

"If it hadn't been along of those two misfortnit ould bastes of bullocks takin' to die on us in the spring——" said Christy, semi-soliloquisingly; but his irrelevant hypothesis was left incomplete, as he broke off, and began to saunter down the beach towards the water's edge. He had come near where the family's boat lay, a broad-beamed rusty-black craft with a fishy aroma, when he was aware of a clatter behind him. It was Johnny following.

"Where was you agoin' to?" he inquired, indifferently.

"Och, I wasn't going anywheres partic'lar," Christy said; but they both continued to make for the boat, and when they reached it, Christy looked as if he meant to step on board.

"Is it after the mackerel you'd be?" said Johnny.

"I might maybe, or else I mightn't," said Christy. "Look-a, Johnny, divil a bit of me would, on'y——"

"Musha now, if here isn't the whole of them follyin' one after the other like so many ould sheep thro' a gap," said Johnny.

In fact a large contingent of their household was advancing upon them in single file. First came Biddy, hooded in her little fawn-coloured shawl, followed closely by Felix and Mick, then, at some distance, Rosanne with her poppy-hued head-gear, and lastly four-year-old Joe, stumping along, the faster, probably, because muffled howls in the background conveyed the impression that his sister, a size smaller, had been intercepted in the act of joining the party. Thereupon Johnny got suddenly into the boat, as if the sight had reinforced his energies, while Christy began to loosen the rope which was wound about a boulder. Biddy, arriving, climbed on board without asking any questions, and her brothers

did likewise, but when Rosanne gained the spot, she paused and enquired—

“Are yous crossin’ over yonder?”

Christy looked round with a start, for Rosanne and her nephew Joe, being bare-footed, had come up noiselessly.

“Murdher on us, Rosy,” he said, “we can’t be takin’ the brats along.”

“Is it Joe?” said Rosanne; “sure I’ll be havin’ me eye on him, and he won’t be too outrageous;” and Joe’s father acquiesced resignedly.

A few minutes afterwards, Johnny and Felix were pulling the boatload steadily through the quiet water. Nobody had mentioned their destination, but it might have been noticed that their course was directed straight towards the landing-place nearest to the railway-station at Knockroe. The sky had clouded over a little, so that stains of opaquer purple and green fell now and then on the smooth clearness through which they were cleaving, and a sparse ruffling up of white foam-crests showed a breeze freshening to seaward. They rowed

for perhaps twenty minutes in silence, and then Christy spoke.

"If we was to be in time at the station yonder," he said, meditatively, "we could be landin' him out as handy as anythin'; she stops a couple of minutes; and no harm done, barrin' the loss of the price of his bit of ticket."

"I question will we ever get in afore her," said Rosanne, glancing shorewards uneasily.

"Ay, will we, right enough," said Felix, "and plenty of spare time to the back of that."

"Ay, won't we thin, after that agin," said Rosanne, "if it's dibblin' your sthrokes that-a way you are, so as one might think you was settin' cabbage-plants wid your oar's end, and waitin' till each sep'rate one come to a head before you wint on to the next."

"Pull up, man, pull up," said Bidy, "there'll be showers, and squalls, and all manner down on top of us in less than no time. The hills are gittin' as thick as a gull's feathers, and it's a bad hour of the day for the weather to be turnin' ugly."

"Sorra a fear there's in it," said Felix. "The two of you's as fidgety as a couple of ould hins. Aisy we'll do it, ay, begor."

But Felix was somewhat over-confident. The Sheehans' voyage proved to be a less expeditious one than he had predicted. In the first place, the tide turned and ran against them; the wind, springing up wet and blustery, was also unfavourable; and they found that they had inadvertently brought a cracked-bladed oar, which craved wary handling, and thus to some extent assisted the retarding power of the little storm. By the time that they made the shore, the flapping gusts were all fully fledged with fine drizzly drops, and the girls' spirits of impatience had subsided into a desponding apathy. The fact of having actually arrived, however, encouraged them to hope that all might yet be well; and everybody bundled on shore in a great hurry, and began to haul up and secure the boat.

They had landed on a shingle-strip, bounded interiorly by the railway, beyond which a flat bit of black bog ran back to the foot of the



hills, down whose dark slopes a curtain of powdered slate-coloured mist was now descending without a hitch. Knockroe lay fast by, though just out of sight behind a headland, and in the opposite direction the line was hidden for a while between the banks of a short cutting, which ended where a bridge crossed a river.

"Now we must run for our lives," Christy was saying, "and one of yous had better to be stoppin' here wid the child."

But as he spoke a wailing screech close at hand sounded like a *keen* shrilled over their hopes. With one consent they stood still, and looked into each other's fallen countenances.

"I could ha' told you all the while we'd be too late," said Biddy.

"The ould banshee's come before she's due on us, and be hanged to her," said Felix.

"Happen," suggested Christy, "it's on'y the goods train after all," and a hopeful gleam passed over the party, to be eclipsed a minute later as the locomotive slid into view. "Och, no, it's herself for sartin," he said disconsolately.

"Wisha, but we've made a botch of it this time entirely, we have so. Off wid himself he is, like it or lump it, the ould crathur, and niver a chance we have to be doin' a hand's turn, no more than if it was the end of the world slitherin' by under our eyes."

"Whoo! och, murdher! saints above, what are you doin' at all?" exclaimed Rosanne, with a sharp shriek.

For at this moment Johnny, with a sudden swoop, twitched her scarlet kerchief off her dark head, as one might pluck the petals off a black-hearted poppy, and before his companions understood what had taken place, he was rushing with all his arms and legs to meet the approaching train, waving his capture wildly, and shouting as he went.

"Mercy on us all alive," said Biddy, dismayed. "Is it cliver and clane deminted the bosthoon's after goin'?"

"How deminted he is, bedad," said Christy, ironically triumphant. "Musha, but it's himself's the ould lad for contrivances. Sure he's stoppin' her by signal, the way they do wid the

red flag when there's somethin' uncomformable on the line ahead. That's what he's up to. Not a word out of yous now"—he lowered his tone to a quite needlessly cautious whisper—"and you'll presently see her slowin' down, so as we'll git the chance to be slippin' the ould man out, same as if we'd caught her in the station."

The result was as Christy had forecast. Scared by Johnny's demonstrations, the great green engine, which had got up but a moderate amount of speed, began promptly to hold its breath, and bite the rails, and with much hissing and clanking and grinding of teeth came to a standstill just where the Sheehans were grouped. They awaited the moment of its halt eagerly and hopefully, all except Joe, who had never before seen a steam-engine at close quarters, and who found the spectacle rather overwhelming. So much so, indeed, that he clung in a furious panic to Rosanne, and at the same time was ungrateful enough to kick her, saying, with howls—

"Why can't you git away out of this, Aunt

Rosy? Don't you see it's stoppin' to make a run at us? You nasty ould baste—I wish we'd niver come."

The men on the engine, meanwhile, were shouting inquiries, the little long-bearded guard had alighted from his van, and came running up with reckless hops between sleeper and sleeper, and on both sides passengers' interrogative heads protruded into the oblique sheets of rain.

"What's amiss there?" called the driver. "What for are you stoppin' us?"

Just a shade of anxiety flitted over the faces of Johnny's brethren; but he had his answer ready, unhesitating and explicit—

"Maybe you've a mind to be takin' a dhrive over Thady M'Clusky's black bull, that's the size of a young turf stack, and the weight of your tender full of coal."

"And where at all have you the baste?" demanded the driver, peering round his screen.

"Where else," bawled Johnny, panting and pointing over his shoulder, "but down under

the arch there, just roundin' the turn, as handy and convenient as anythin' to be upsettin' the whole of yous into the middle of next week."

"Why the mischief didn't some of you put the brute off of the track then?" said the guard.

"Is it put him off you was sayin'? Troth and indeed, belike you'd fancy the job yourself, if you was after beholdin' him pitchforkin' away at the sleepers and metals wid his skivers of ould horns that's the len'th of the divil's backbone. And himself notorious in the townland for the head-strongest, cross-temperedest ould mule in creation. Was we to be foolin' down there argufyin' and contindin' wid him, till you come along full tilt and made mincemeat permiscuous of the lot of us, instid of killin' meself skytin' back to give you warnin' of him? Faix, did you hear the roar he let that time? It's just waitin' paiceable you may be till he takes it into his head to throt away wid himself off up the hill or somewheres, for stir he won't, not for man or stick."

Through all this volubility Johnny was watching to see whether his relatives would

turn to account the opportunity which he had created for them, and he observed with satisfaction that they were doing so. Biddy and Christy and Felix and Mick were running along the train, jumping up at every door, as a wave springs up occasionally when lapping against the base of a cliff; and he knew that they were calling—

“Hi, Uncle Jim. Is ould Jimmy Sheehan in it?”

Mick it was who first hit upon the right carriage, where, midway on a crowded bench, between a scared-looking country lass and a large ruddy farmer, sat forlornly crouched a little very old man, with grey worsted stockings and a long blue coat, which almost hid them. At the sound of his own name he gathered himself up in a woe-begone sort of flurry.

“Is it the ticket they’re a-wantin’?” he said. “Ay, man, I’ll sort it out for you agin,” and he began to fumble with shaking hands at the blue bundle on his knee.

“Niver mind th’ ould ticket, Uncle Jim,” said Mick, and swinging backwards from the win-

dow, he shouted, "Christy, Biddy, we've got him here."

The others came with a rush.

"Are you helpin' him out?" said Christy. "You'd a right to be quick about it, for there's no sayin' how soon they may be goin' ahead agin."

Inside the carriage the old man stood up unsteadily with an expression of rapturous bewilderment.

"Whethen now, glory be to goodness," he said, "if it isn't the childher; mercy be among us, and meself makin' sure I'd be seein' sight nor light of a one of thim more in me life's days. Och, childher, but ye're the great rogues whatever, and that's a fac'!"

"Come along wid you out to us, Uncle Jim," Biddy called up anxiously, 'or they'll be startin' off."

"But sure, boys dear, its to Drumkillen I'm a-goin'," said Uncle Jim, the rapture fading out of his bewilderment, "and yous 'ill be takin' off home."

"Divil a bit of you's goin' to Drumkillen," said Christy, "we're awantin' you at our place. Twist the handle for him, Mick; it's apt to be stiff. Give it a good wranch round."

"I'm wranchin' it terrific this long while," said Mick, "but stir it won't."

"Be jabbers then, himself's after lockin' us in, the time he tore the tickets above at the station," said Uncle Jim, peering down aghast at the distant ground, which no platform interposed to bring within easier reach. "Saints preserve us, what 'ill I do at all, at all?"

"No harm," said Christy; "sure we'll land you out thro' the windy here, and sorra the more trouble about it than if it was slippin' an ould mackerel out of a fishin'-creel."

This was in fact straightway accomplished, with friendly co-operation from the other occupants of the compartment.

"If 'twas for the matther of his ticket you're gettin' him out unbeknownst," one of them said confidentially to Christy, as he handed him Uncle Jim's blue-handkerchiefed bundle, "he has it all the while right enough. I noticed



him' doin' it up in the handkercher-corner on'y a little bit ago."

"Sure, man," answered Christy, with some pride, "amn't I after meself buyin' it for him this mornin' above at Haganstown Junction? Ay, bedad, and it stood us in three-and-thrupence, ivery pinny of it; but, faix, I'd liefer spend as much agin, supposin' I had it in me pocket, than to be lettin' the ould crathur quit out disolit among strangers at his life's end."

By this time several people, who had been cutting turf on the bog at a little distance, arrived more or less out of breath, extremely curious to learn what had stopped the train, and they speedily organised a party, armed mainly with *loys*, for the dislodgment of Mr M'Clusky's bull, who really was, as Johnny had asserted, an ill-reputed character in the neighbourhood. Johnny availed himself of the diversion to break off his parleying with the officials, and he sped swiftly to join his family, gathering up Rosanne and Joe by the way.

"Well, Uncle Jim, it's yourself," he said, in hurried congratulation. "Let's be steppin'

along down to the boat, while the lads there are lookin' around them, for they might presently get passin' remarks about things. Put your best fut foremost, Uncle Jim, and Christy 'll be loanin' you an arm. We'll run across home wid the bit of breeze afore they're done dhrivin' all the cattle yonder under the ould bridge."

The wind had dropped considerably, but the rain was heavier, and the mist thicker than ever, and these helped to cover the precipitate retreat of the Sheehans. In a very few minutes they had safely embarked, and while Peter Brady with his comrades were still advancing circumspectly upon the reported obstruction, and while passengers were still demanding fearsomely or furiously the cause of the delay, the boat vanished from sight of the receding shore among the mist-swirls, which only now and then permitted a flare of Rosanne's recovered handkerchief, or a gleam of the bit of sail hoisted for the rowers' relief. They scudded on for some time in silence, unbroken except by the old man, who sat smiling in the rain with his knees gathered

up to his chin, and at intervals ejaculated complacently—

“Och, childher dear, but you’re the quare *slieveens* entirely; begorrah now you bate all that ever I saw; och, it’s yourselves are the great ould rogues and thieves of the world.” At last, however, a less agreeable reflection struck him. “Ah, dear, but I’m the rael ould gomeral,” he said, ruefully, “if I amn’t after lavin’ the grand blackthorn stick that Mick gave me, over there in the railway carriage. Lost it is on me body and bones. You see, bein’ new to me yet, it hadn’t got a hold like on me mind, and so it slipped out of me recollection.”

“Sure, no matter at all,” said Mick, “I’ll cut you twice as good a one to-morra.”

Just then a booming rumble sounded dully from the shore; it was the train crossing the bridge.

“Faix, they’re after runnin’ over th’ ould bull, horns and all,” Felix said, with a chuckle.

But his great-uncle’s face lengthened regretfully.

“Ay, sure enough, she’s gone on wid her-

self," he said, "and to think of all the people she had in her, the crathurs, quittin' out of their places. There was a slip of a girl in the carriage along wid me, about the size maybe of Rosanne, looked to be cryin' the two eyes out of her head, rael discouraged like. And I seen a couple of spalpeens that was frightened at the whistle screechin'; and a dacint little ould woman sittin' all of a heap be herself. I wasn't mindin' them greatly, but sure now, childher, it's a pity to think of the whole of them bein' took along that way, and they wid niver a sowl to lend them a hand out thro' the windy."

"Musha, good gracious, Uncle Jim," said Felix, "you didn't expec' us to be clearin' out the whole trainful?"

"Bedad, if we'd thought to take that loadin' on board, it's to the bottom th' ould boat 'ud be apt to ha' gone afore ever she reached over yonder," Mick objected, matter-of-factly.

"And maybe some of the people might be goin' back home to their own places," said Rosanne, anxious to present railway-travelling

under a consolatory aspect. Her remark, however, appeared to waken another disquieting thought in the old man's mind.

"Christy, lad," he said, in a mysterious undertone, "what 'ud you suppose herself over there'll be apt to say to me comin' back wid yous?"

"Is it Theresa? And what at all should she say agin it I'd be glad to know?" rejoined Christy very boldly, though in point of fact his imagination answered the inquiry with rather inconvenient distinctness.

"Herself," otherwise Mrs Christy Sheehan, was at that moment standing on the shingle near her door with her Aunt Sally, looking out for the boat, as they had done, at diminishing intervals, all the afternoon. The flowing tide had swallowed up many boulders and much shingle since the others started, but it crept a good deal closer, and Mrs Christy and Mrs Dowdall had time to remark frequently on the "polthogues" of rain, and to wonder "what they were after," and to predict that "they'd be dhrenched entirely," before a dark

bow began to blot through the pale wisps of mist. Then in a minute or two Mrs Christy exclaimed—

“Saints around us! I'll give you me word, Aunt Sal, they've got the ould man in the boat wid them.”

“Och, woman, don't be talkin' foolish. Did any one ever hear tell of the like of that? Why, then, they must ha' skyted over to Knockroe wid the intention of landin' him out of the train when it would be stoppin' at the station.”

“Well, now,” said Mrs Christy, “I had the notion in me mind all along that they were up to some manner of divilment. But I declare to goodness I dunno but what I'm as glad of it as not. It's lonesome the house has been this day, wid nothin' stirrin' in the crathur's corner.”

“May goodness forgive me,” said the Widdy Dowdall, “but I believe 'twas the best thing they could ha' done. It's too ould the man is to be stravadin' about the world away from his own people.”

And when the boat came in, Mrs Christy's greeting of Uncle Jimmy, watched with some anxiety by the rest of the party, was cordial and complacent.

"Och, man alive," she said, "you're as dhreeped wid the wet as if they'd been streelin' you after them thro' the say-wather. I declare I'll run in and set on the griddle, and be bakin' a bit of hot pitaty-cake for the supper."

About noon next day, Colonel Wallis, late a passenger on the line between Haganstown and Drumkillen, was composing a long letter to the *Irish Times*, describing how he had been an eye-witness of a diabolical attempt to wreck the train in which he and his family were travelling. At the same time Christy Sheehan was once more surveying his oat-patch, upon the aspect of which the past twenty-four hours had wrought a disastrous change. Its once smooth and comely surface now showed many melancholy depressions where the feathery crests lay low, and in some places they were wisped round and matted together as if a

company of small whirlwinds had been waltzing among them.

"Bad luck then to that plop of rain last night," said Rosanne, who was standing beside her brother, "they're bet down dreadful."

"Ah, sure, they might get up agin after a while," said Christy, hopefully. "Rosanne, the crathur was mortal glad to be took back."



## AN ESCAPE.

“Where the midge dares not venture  
Lest herself fast she lay.”

GEORGIE HESPERTON had been more or less put upon most of her life, and had grown used to the process, if she had not exactly learned to like it. I do not mean to say that she was ever seriously ill-treated. It was mainly that her family were wont to devolve upon her the less agreeable of the social functions which they found it expedient to perform, and these, of course, scarcely came under the head of hardships. Still, the mother, Lady Hesperton, being a widow, not over richly left, her purpose, that herself and daughters three should keep a footing in society, and duly follow its fashion-led movements, did entail upon them some laborious days. It would be an exaggeration to assert that she could

not drink her tea without a stratagem; but it is quite true that she, and Georgie, and the Twins could not drink it under the distinguished auspices which she desired without a certain amount of scheming and manœuvring. And as the various small crises of the campaign recurred—when there were duty-visits to be paid, tedious correspondences to be kept up, dull callers to be conversed to, or attractive entertainment, where a third was *de trop*, to be foregone—the others had got into the habit of utilising Georgie. This had come about partly through the fact that her juniors, Sylvia and May, invariably backed one another up on such occasions, and were commonly joined by their mother, forming a triple alliance which an isolated power has often found irresistible. But a stronger reason lay in Georgie's own pliant disposition, which had early gained her a domestic reputation for "not minding" whatever somebody else particularly wished to shirk. The proverbial naturalist, however, instructs us that the imposition of the last straw may inconveni-

ence the camel's owner, and even Georgie was once driven to rebel against her load.

This was the situation. The time for fixing on summer plans had arrived—towards autumn—and several circumstances made a decision rather unusually difficult. At this season the Hespertons were always accustomed to count in some measure upon the hospitality of friends, nor had they now reckoned without their hostesses ; but the invitations to hand did not give general satisfaction. There was, indeed, a charming letter from the Portwyn-Selmonts offering a month's board and lodging at their Brilmouth villa, a delightful place and house, to which everyone would joyously have resorted ; but, alas, this invitation included *three* persons only, and who should be the left-out fourth ? An answer seemed suggested by the fact that Sylvia's especial friend, Edith Battersby, had written urgently pressing a long visit to Dormead, a featureless inland village, at the mention of which Miss Sylvia disdainfully tossed up her chin. Yet, since no other prospect opened, things began to look very much as if Dormead

would be her portion, and Sylvia herself had begun to look undisguisedly cross, when a morning's mail changed the aspect of affairs by bringing a letter from Lady Hesperton's brother-in-law, the girls' uncle John.

The Reverend John Hesperton was a person seldom heard of, and still more rarely seen, beyond the bounds of his remote Cambrian parish; the girls, indeed, had never set eyes on him, and their mother had only dim recollections of two or three meetings about the time of her marriage, while letters had averaged perhaps one in an Olympiad. Now, however, he appeared to meditate the drawing tauter of these somewhat slack family ties. His letter was recognised by its experienced readers as obviously the precursor of a formal invitation, a feeler thrown out to ascertain his chances of securing a guest. He wrote, for instance, of how much he missed his eldest daughter, Mina, "his right hand in the parish work," who had gone abroad with an invalided aunt. And "I am sometimes tempted," went on the old rector in his polite, precise phrase, "to ask you to

spare me one of your bright young people for a while. Dear Mina's absence has left a little chamber unoccupied, and poor Carrie would be greatly cheered by a companion in her long walks and a coadjutrix in her classes at the Sunday school. Yet I fear that Grantrigg would be but a dull abode for such fashionable young ladies as my nieces. Pray give them their old uncle's kindest remembrances." A wave of sympathetic aversion ran round the breakfast-table as Lady Hesperton read out the words "long walks" and "Sunday school," and there was a short pause before somebody said: "He'll ask one of us as sure as fate, if we answer him civilly." "And it really would be very convenient if he did," said somebody else. "It mightn't be so bad either, for anyone who likes the country." "As Georgie does, you know." "Of course the scenery up there is lovely." A brickfield and a coal-pit happened, as a matter of fact, to be the most prominent natural features of Grantrigg. "I dare say, indeed, it would be pleasant enough, just for a few weeks—for anyone who fancied that sort of place, I

mean." "*Georgie*, now, very likely wouldn't mind it a bit."

Georgie listened to the rustle of the meshes closing in around her, and she did mind dreadfully. She had private reasons for wishing very, very especially to be of the Brilmouth party; yet what could she do? For not only did the frosty weight of custom lie heavily upon her — and custom far more than conscience makes cowards of us all—but those reasons were a secret which she would not have yielded to the most ingenious blandishments of Don Torquemada himself. So she continued to stir her coffee without entering any protest.

"I suppose I had better write to him myself," said Lady Hesperton, after a little more conversation of a like tendency, "though I can scarcely be ready for the first post, and there's no time to lose—isn't this the seventh? But if I leave it to one of you girls, you'll write about nothing except operas and dances, till you give the poor man an idea that you are a set of dissipated heathens, whom he wouldn't venture to import into his parish."

“Oh, let Georgie write, *as she's going*,” said Sylvia; “and you know she has just been at the Honchester Ecclesiastical Conference; she could give him an account of that; nothing could be more appropriate.”

It was true that Georgie had recently been carried to this entertainment by old Lady Lucy Rambaut, a serious social *numen*, whom it was occasionally needful to propitiate; and now to make that self-renouncing act instrumental in enforcing another, was a piece of sharp practice which, perhaps, smote May with some compunction, for she said: “Oh, I'll write, if Georgie has anything else to do.”

But Georgie replied quickly: “No, thank you, May, I may just as well do it myself. I really”—falling into the wonted formula—“I really don't mind.”

The truth was that she had been stung by a sudden thought, and thrilled with a bold design, which only the stress of a great emergency could have impelled her actually to carry out. Seated at her little desk, she slowly and thoughtfully wrote the letter that should pro-

cure her invitation to Grantrigg Rectory. She bestowed much care and no small skill upon the whole composition ; but the most painfully elaborated passage was the following, which I subjoin : “ Last week,” she wrote, “ I went with a friend of ours to the Ecclesiastical Conference at Honchester, which was most interesting. Everything was really very well done. The Bishops and other great people went to the Town Hall in a grand procession, with the Corporation, and the City Militia, and the Fire Brigade, and all that. Of course there was a tremendous crowd on the day when the Imperial High Commissioner gave his address, and everybody was so delighted with it. I am afraid I don't exactly remember what his subject was, but I know he said it seemed probable that nothing in particular was true, but that people could go on believing whatever they liked all the same, which did just as well. And all the Bishops said it was perfectly satisfactory. I hear his address is to be printed in a sort of tract, and no doubt you will read it ; it was very earnest and convincing. I am



sure I should like very much to teach in your Sunday school," Georgie continued, with a dexterous juxtaposition which would have done credit to an older hand at diplomacy. "It must be very nice, and I suppose it is not difficult when one has had a little practice."

"I really shouldn't wonder if he didn't ask me after all," Georgie reflected with a flicker of a smile as she looked over her letter. "I think I'll let May see it, and then she can testify that it was all right." In which resolve Georgie again showed a fine judgment, for May was decidedly the stupid one of her family, and by no means likely to read between lines or discriminate shades of tone. "I'm sure it ought to do beautifully," she said with admiration after the perusal; "the part about the Conference sounds splendid."

But, unhappily, Georgie's cleverness altogether failed to accomplish what she had intended. She had forecast rightly enough the feelings with which her uncle would read her letter; but it is easier to calculate upon rousing another person's emotions than to predict the

influence which these will have upon his behaviour, more especially when the person in question chances to be a complete stranger. Thus, in the present case, Mr Hesperton was much shocked and pained by his niece's account of her recent spiritual experiences, but instead of consequently regarding her as a moral leper, whose blighting presence in his wholesome cure was a peril to be piously shunned, he looked upon her compassionately, as one afflicted with a mind diseased, to which Providence had plainly set in his way the duty of ministering. Neither his conscience nor his natural benevolence would allow him to evade the responsibility. One consideration only gave him pause : was he justified in exposing his motherless Carrie to the dangers which might spring from association with this misguided girl ? But he dismissed the faint-hearted doubt after a brief struggle. He would watch Carrie closely, and send her to stay with his sister, if he deemed it advisable. Come what might, he would not throw away the chance of rescuing one of poor Edward's daughters from

bondage to such lamentable views. "Believe whatever they like"—"perfectly satisfactory"—poor young thing, with what culpable negligence she must have been brought up! The old rector's white whisker-frill framed a face full of concern as he rose from his chair and began to pace his little study. "I have it," he said to himself, his eye falling upon his book-shelves; "I'll arrange a short course of reading to go through with her when she comes. I must make time for it after dinner; I'm getting too fond of my nap and my arm-chair. Perhaps it would be best to begin by asking her to read aloud to me, to save my eyes, that the thing may not look premeditated. Let me see, here are Paley's "Evidences," and the immortal "Analogy;" they may possibly be considered *antiquated* nowadays," he mused, fondly flicking off the dusty cobwebs and throwing several book-mites into grave consternation, "and I might do well to send for some of the S.P.C.K.'s new volumes; though it would be difficult, I take it, to improve upon Bishop Butler."

Having decided upon that step, the rector sat down and wrote to his niece ; but being, for his part, a man of some discretion, he said nothing about the Conference, or the Sunday school, or the " Analogy." He simply wrote a very kind letter, warmly inviting her to Grantrigg, and begging her to fix an early date for her arrival. Georgie read this good-natured epistle with intense dismay and chagrin. She had spent two days in a fool's paradise, listening with false security while her family discussed their plans upon the basis of her own relegation to Cumberland, an arrangement which she had, she thought, effectually precluded. But now her doom was sealed—literally, for her old-fashioned uncle used wax and a signet-ring—and bitterly feeling it vain to contend further with fate, she dutifully penned an acceptance, and applied herself to the task of disguising the fact that she was " of ladies most deject and wretched." This task, indeed, became daily harder, amid the 'Twins' gleeful bustle of preparation and anticipation and her own melancholy brooding

upon all that her absence would lose her, and, still worse, what it might in one quarter be taken to imply. A considerable effort was needed to keep her countenance and her temper at approximately their normal length, and Georgie's previous apprenticeship to that useful craft stood her in good stead.

One morning, however, it appeared that Sylvia, also, had a grievance, which she did not feel called upon to hide. "I'm horribly disappointed," she broke out in the course of breakfast, "that the Saxmores won't be at Brilmouth after all. They would have been quite certain to have got up some private theatricals; Betty's as cracked about them as I am. Do you remember what splendid ones they had at the Manor last year? As it is now, I don't think there'll be anybody there likely to go in for anything of the kind."

"I quite believe you've got theatricals on the brain, Syl," said May, who was not a success before the curtain, but who much excelled behind a net; "at any rate, there's sure to be no end of tennis, and we ought to be able to get

up a grand tournament. They say it's possible that Barlow and the Renshaws may come."

"One gets deadly sick of perpetual tennis," grumbled Sylvia, "and, besides that, it's no good for wet days. I dare say it will rain half the time. I'd been looking forward *particularly* to the Saxmores. I'd even got my French marquise frock done up on purpose."

"Oh, well, there'll be plenty of nice people anyhow. The Carfords' yacht is expected there next week, and Mr Page-Scott was to be with them—the little Scotchman, you know, whom we met at the Ruxtons in the spring, and thought so pleasant. By the way, I suppose his leave must be coming to an end. Didn't you say, Georgie, that he had told you he was going out again to Bombay some time in the autumn?"

Georgie daresaid he had, but didn't exactly remember. She supposed—also by the way, though of what is not quite clear—that she would have to write a line to Carrie at Grant-rigg Rectory. Yes, she had had a note that morning, and had left it somewhere or other,

most likely in her own room. And therewith the breakfast party dispersed.

In the course of that afternoon Sylvia, who had spent the morning shopping with her mother and May, lighted upon a folded letter stuck marker-wise in the third volume of "Juliet's Jewelled Yoke," a work which both she and Georgie happened to be reading. Letters left promiscuously lying about were recognised as common property by the Hesperton household, so Sylvia had no scruple in reading this one ; and as she opened it, out of the innermost folds slipped a tiny shred of silver tinsel, which might have been placed there with some special object, but Sylvia, naturally enough, did not notice it. The letter, dated from "The Rectory," and written in a schoolgirlish sort of hand, was evidently Grantrigg Carrie's, and began with enthusiastic expressions of delight at the prospect of Georgie's visit.

"It is particularly lucky," the writer proceeded, "that you are coming just now, for I never remember when there was so much going on here as there is at present. As a rule we

are not very lively, but this summer several sets of nice people have come to the neighbourhood, and then the Elvenmeres are at the Castle, which makes a great difference. Their eldest son comes of age this month, and they are to have grand doings—dances, and *magnificent* private theatricals, with a real stage-manager from London! Are you fond of acting? I have an idea that we heard from somebody that one of you was awfully good at it. If so, you are certain to be requisitioned for the Castle, as I know the Elvenmeres have been disappointed by their “leading lady,” and are on the look-out for another. They wanted me to take a part, but I have no gifts for that kind of thing. However, I told them yesterday that I thought I knew of some one. What a mercy it is that papa is not Low Church! If he had been, of course we should have had to be horrified at anything entertaining, but, as it is, we go everywhere. I hope we shall have great fun while you are here.—Your affectionate cousin, CARRIE. P.S.—If you have a nice *wig*, do bring it with you on Monday. I know it



sounds rather an odd request, but they say it is sometimes very hard to get a becoming one."

An hour or so later, Georgie, entering the breakfast-room, was aware of Sylvia sitting, a small palpably disconsolate heap, in a sofa-corner; and she derived what under any ordinary circumstances would have been a very unsisterly satisfaction from the sight. That it did please, and did not surprise her, was due to a superficially irrelative fact, namely, her ascertainment that the significant tinsel-thread no longer lurked in Carrie's letter. It would not, however, have by any means jumped with Georgie's design to assume the existence of the slightest connection between her cousin's communication and her sister's symptoms of distress. Therefore, in response to an ostentatious sigh, she merely said: "Dear me, Syl, have you got your neuralgia again?"

"Oh yes," Sylvia answered dolorously; "it's pretty bad this evening. I suppose it's going to rain, for you know *my* neuralgia is always worse in damp."

Georgie sympathetically suggested various remedies, which were querulously rejected, and a brief silence followed, Sylvia sitting with the corners of her mouth pathetically tucked down, and her front hair wildly fluffed up in a manner indicative of much distraction. Then she resumed her plaint. "I hope I shan't have it all the time we're at Brilmouth, but the sea air always *is* bad for it. I'm almost sorry, on that account, that we've settled to go there."

Georgie admitted with candour that neuralgia certainly was an awful plague.

"Do you know, Georgie," Sylvia said hesitatingly after another pause, "I really think that, if you didn't particularly *want* to go to Grantrigg, it might be *wiser* for me to change with *you*. You see, it would be such a bore if I did have constant neuralgia; and I believe the sea air at Brilmouth is dreadfully *strong*. Of course one of us would do just as well as the other at either place."

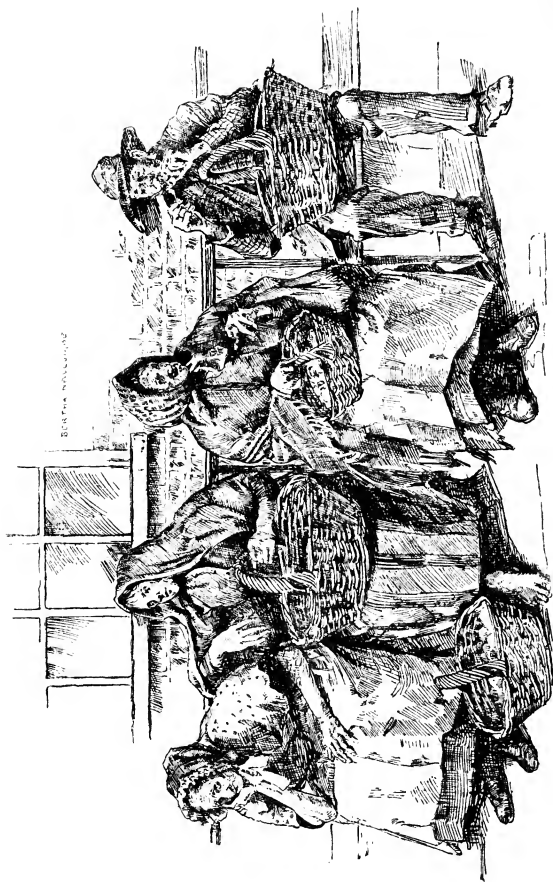
"Oh, of course, as far as that goes, it wouldn't make the least difference," Georgie conceded, "but then you'd find it so dull."

"I daresay I would," quoth Sylvia, who, however, had the grace to turn rather pink; "but it would be better than having neuralgia. One can't enjoy anything when one has *neuralgia*, you know." A reply most reassuring to Georgie, as it showed an intention on Sylvia's part to ignore the alluring letter, a line of conduct which would effectually bar many future complications.

Well, the upshot of it was that the two plotters, deceiver and deceived, accomplished the transfer, and that Georgie went to Brilmouth, where the sea air was so strong and the Carfords' yacht was lying in the harbour; while Sylvia repaired to Grantrigg, where the air, we may surmise, had castles in it, and where there was no doubt about Paley's "Evidences" and the Sunday school. Georgie did not escape a twinge of self-reproach as she saw her sister off with rouge and pearl powder and a curly Pompadour wig stowed away at the bottom of an enormous trunk. "I'll do her a good turn to make up for it the first time I have a chance," she vowed to herself while the engine was

panting out of the terminus. But since, before many weeks had elapsed, she sailed for India in the *rôle* of Mrs Page-Scott, she may have been obliged to defer indefinitely the execution of her amiable resolve.





SCOTT'S NOVELS

## THE MURPHYS' SUPPER.

THE cockle-pickers who carry on their business along the stretches of muddy sea-shore between Dublin and Howth are not a particularly attractive class of people. The traveller on the road which leads to and from the scene of their labours is likely to have an opportunity for observing their outward peculiarities, as he will probably meet or pass whole batches of them shuffling along bare-footed, with a gait that always seems to be on the point of breaking into a slow jog-trot, and bending forward under the weight of their damp heavy baskets. They are not a handsome race, shaggy beetling brows, small twinkling, peering eyes, harsh black locks, and a prognathic contour of visage being common features among them. Nor is their costume calculated to set them off. Unpicturesque squalor is the main characteristic of their gar-

ments, which are in texture and tint curiously subdued to what their wearers work in. Their multitudinous tatters flap with a sort of unnatural stiffness on the breeze, as if starched with a compound of the wet sand and mud which their colour so closely matches, while here and there the peculiar iridescent greenish shade of stuff that has once been black gives a suggestion of the slimy weed-scum which in some places films over that oozy shore.

If you had happened to meet Joe Murphy among a gang of cockle-pickers, the chances are that you would have considered him to be the most ill-looking of the set by reason of the stolidly sullen expression which pervaded his coarse ugly visage. And, as a matter of fact, he was a cross-grained and—rather an exceptional circumstance among his class—a very stupid, slow-minded man. This last quality was to a certain extent the cause of the first, his moroseness being continually aggravated by a dim consciousness that he was somehow more likely to be taken in, and less able to effectively reciprocate, than were the majority of his



acquaintances. But it may be inferred that bad temper ran in his branch of the Murphy family, inasmuch as his sister Biddy, who had her full share of mother-wit, was even crosser than he. Indeed, she had been a sort of daily terror to the cockle-picking fraternity and sisterhood, until, within the last six months or so, a bad cold had terminated in a decline, the rapid progress of which prevented her from any longer taking part in their pilgrimages. The disappearance from among them of her peevish face and shrewish tongue was a real relief to her former associates, though, in view of the melancholy cause of her absence, they damped down their rejoicing decorously with many a seemly and not insincerely uttered "Poor cratur!" and "The Saints pity her!" Joe Murphy was very far from sharing in their gladness; and this was not because the burden of Biddy's maintenance now fell upon him, but because for thirty-five out of the forty years of his life he had cared more about her than about anything else in the world.

Joe had more capacity for affection than a

casual observer would have surmised. It is true that he was at this time, owing to the matured inertness and rigidity of his dull faculties, almost incapable of forming any new attachment; but to those which circumstances had thrown in his way during the more receptive period of youth he had always been blindly and unswervingly faithful. Originally one of a large family, among whom he had occupied the position of general laughing-stock and scapegoat, he had attached himself adhesively to every member of the circle, but especially to little Biddy, the youngest child, perhaps because for the first two or three years of her life she had been unable to gibe at, snub, and brow-beat him, as her elders did—a course of procedure which she, however, took the earliest opportunity of adopting. And now death and dispersion had left her, in the shape of an ill-favoured middle-aged woman, his whole accessible relative, and the object of whatever solicitude he had to spare from his own immediate concerns—an amount which, all things considered, was quite up to the average. Naturally,

therefore, the idea of losing this unique treasure was intolerable to him. During the time when she was away at the hospital, and so ill that he was forced to contemplate the possibility of her never coming out alive, he was like one distracted; and when she at last returned to him, apparently not much the worse, "only a thrifle wake," he made haste to thrust the miserable fear into the remotest background of his thoughts. In the first joy of his relief from immediate apprehension, he brought Biddy's basket out of the corner, and spliced one of the ropes which was in a doubtful condition, thinking the while that in another day or two she would be able to "thramp around" as usual, and resolving that he would in future always give her a long lift with her load on the road home. But when the weeks went by, and Biddy still seemed to be incapable of doing anything except crawl about and cough, his fears began to creep back to him again, much as he had often seen the cold sluggish tide stealing in over the weedy shingle; and at length his uneasiness rose to such a height that it drove him

to seek an interview with the doctor who had attended her in the hospital. But from this interview, which he encompassed at the cost of great trouble and vast exertion of his tardily moving intellect, he derived little information, and less comfort. The doctor, tired and hurried after a long day's work, was neither able nor willing to bestow much time upon the uncouth-looking individual who so inopportunately wanted to know "what way Biddy Murphy was," and so large a portion of the few minutes which he could spare was taken up in identifying this particular Biddy, that he had only time for a curt intimation that he "saw no prospect of her ultimate recovery"—a verdict which was about as intelligible to Joe as it would be to some of us if delivered rapidly in Greek. After much painful pondering, however, he interpreted it to mean that "the doctor didn't think she'd be anythin' betther yit awhile"—a cheerless reflection, which was rendered still gloomier by his vague misgiving that the words might bear an even more unfavourable construction.

Such being the state of his feelings, he was

caused infinite miserable irritation by the frankness with which, quite conformably to the code of manners recognised in their grade of society, his companions discussed Biddy's future prospect, more especially since they took, as is their wont, the most desponding view of her condition. He could by no means endure to hear their outspoken prognostications and corroborative instances, and the impatience which he manifested when addressed upon the subject was regarded as indicating a highly reprehensible want of proper feeling. Thus, when one morning he was accosted by Judy Flynn with, "Well, Joe, and how's the sisther to-day?" and Maggie Byrne added, "Och sure, she'll not be a throuble to ye much longer, the cratur'," he roughly requested them to "hould their fool's gab," appending various epithets which it is not necessary to reproduce. Whereupon Maggie expressed her opinion that he was "a big brute," and "as bitther as sut;" while Judy that evening saved a piece of salt herring for Biddy from her own not too plentiful supper, on the grounds of her being afflicted with such

an "onnatural baste" of a brother. But all that day Joe carried about with him a haunting dread which lay like a cold hand upon his heart.

As for Biddy, her pronounced invalidism did not make much difference in the sum total of her felicity or infelicity, she having been so long accustomed to feel weak and ill that the cessation of her wearisome working-days fully counterbalanced any increase of physical suffering for the present entailed by the progress of her disease, while, being aware that the neighbours always talked about wakes and "buryings" upon the slightest symptom of indisposition, she was shrewd enough to pay little heed to their predictions of her approaching demise. She generally had nearly enough to eat, and a scrap of fire in the grate when the weather was very cold, for Joe's income was decidedly above the average in his trade, as he seemed to have an instinct—perhaps inherited, since his father had picked cockles before him—which guided him unerringly to prolific mud-patches, and he now sometimes brought home Biddy's basket half full in addition to his own. Yet, notwith-

standing her comparatively affluent circumstances, Biddy was not unmolested by visitants from that tribe of unsatisfied desires which thrust themselves, by hook or by crook, into almost every lot, under widely varying shapes indeed, but always preserving the tribal characteristic of keeping in sight and out of reach.

There is a kind of round, flat flour cake, often to be seen in bakers' windows of the humbler sort, with smooth upper and under crusts, between which the softer dough, richly yellowed with abundant soda and strongly flavoured butterine, seems to bulge out in its exuberance, like the pulp of an over-ripened fruit. These cakes are about five inches in diameter and one inch in thickness, and they cost three-halfpence apiece, so that they are rather an expensive form of bakement. Yet it happened that during a short period of Biddy's childhood they had been a luxury which she enjoyed with comparative frequency, the family being acquainted with a baker in a small way, who was accustomed to pay for pints of cockles in kind, often with an unsale-

able stale cake of the above description, to a share of which Biddy, in her capacity of youngest, and rather spoiled, child, generally attained; (Joe never did). It was now many a year since a violent difference of opinion about a bad fourpenny bit had terminated all amicable relations between Peter O'Rourke and the Murphy family; but Biddy retained a fond recollection of those no longer forthcoming dainties, and with her failing health there had grown upon her an ever stronger craving to taste of them again. This craving had of late been augmented by the circumstances that a good-natured ne'er-do-weel neighbour had one evening shared such a cake with her, and since then she had often talked of the "iligant tay" she had had on that occasion, confidently avowing her belief, that if she could always get the like she would soon be "as sthrong as iver she was in her born days."

Joe Murphy listened silently to these remarks, which Biddy made out of sheer querulousness, having no ulterior motive or expectation, and the longer he listened the more intensely he



wished that he could get his sister what she wanted. But the thing seemed to be altogether impossible. Three-halfpence was more than he could afford—that is to say, more than he had—to spend on one of Biddy's meals, exclusive of the indispensable cup of tay, and he knew besides that a single cake would not satisfy her, as her appetite was very inconveniently large. How were the necessary pennies to be acquired? The plan of foregoing his own supper would not answer. This he knew by experience, for when one morning during her stay in hospital he had gone without his breakfast to buy her some oranges, he had felt so “rael quare” all the day that his cockle-picking had fared but badly, and he had brought home his basket only half-filled. So the oranges could not be bought after all, and Biddy had said that she supposed he had gone off on the spree and spent his money drinking because her back was turned. Joe was not a man of much resource, and several weeks went by before his brain excogitated another expedient.

These cockle-pickers are in the habit of patronising the railway line between Dublin and Howth, some of the intermediate stations on which are situated within a convenient distance of their fishing-grounds. The most fashionable thing to do is to walk out from Dublin a distance of six or seven miles, paddle in the mud until interrupted by darkness or the returning tide, and then convey your heavy basket to Ballyhoy station, a mile or two nearer town. There the rugged band may often be seen crouching beside their baskets on the little platform, apparently well content, after their day's wading, with a seat upon firm, and comparatively dry, ground. Their third-class tickets cost them "thruppence," a large percentage on the day's gains; and though a cockle-picker does occasionally expend fivepence on a return ticket, and travel luxuriously both ways, such instances of extravagance are extremely rare. Now it suddenly occurred to Joe that if he were to walk home instead of going by train he would straightway find himself in possession of the threepence requisite for the pur-

chase of those coveted cakes. "Bedad, now, it's a quare *sthookawn* I am to not ha' thought of it before," he said to himself, as he lay huddled up on his straw bed—for the idea had come to him in the night—"but thramp it I will a' Monday as sure as I'm a sinner." And for once in his life he reflected with regret that the morrow being Sunday he could not immediately carry out his plan. There was nothing intrinsically attractive, certainly, in the prospect of an additional five miles' trudge, heavily laden; but his one-idea'd mind was bent rather on picturing Biddy's delight at the unexpected treat, than on the lengthening vistas of the bleak Dublin road; and he went to sleep with an impression that a piece of good luck had befallen him.

The Monday following this happy inspiration of Joe's was a most dreary November morning. All day a frosty sea-fog drifted about the coast, blotting out the delicate blue sweep of the Dublin mountains, and blurring even the bolder purple of Howth's less distant slopes. Chilly, drenching showers plashed by in swift succession, and when, warned by the early darkness,

Joe and his companions turned their faces towards the shingly lane which led up from the beach, they were scarcely less damp and cold, and probably far more painfully alive to their condition, than their undemonstrative stock-in-trade. It must be confessed that Joe had by this time begun to take a somewhat faint-hearted view of his homeward journey. He could not refrain from wistfully contrasting the ten minutes' smooth, effortless transit in the lighted weather-proof railway-carriage with the long hour and more of toilsome plodding through darkness, cold, and wet which his new resolve now destined for him. Still, that resolve continued to hold good. Before the brilliant anticipation of how Biddy would smack her lips over her supper that night—for I must admit the alienating fact that she was prone to this inarticulate mode of expressing her satisfaction with her bill of fare—all his forecastings of personal discomfort melted into insignificance, as thin clouds melt in their passage across the crystal disc of the full moon. Nor was that brightness extinguished, albeit somewhat dimmed, by the

denser texture of the most serious foreboding which he entertained in connection with his impending lonely tramp. This was the reflection that he would have to traverse a certain tree-shadowed bit of road a mile beyond Ballyhoy, which is commonly reported to be "walked" after nightfall by a headless ghost, and is consequently in evil repute among less abnormally constituted foot-passengers. Joe was a firm believer in this gruesome spectre, legends of which he had heard from his earliest days; and now, as he made his way towards the station amid the deepening dusk, he felt keenly that the presence of a human fellow-traveller would immensely diminish the terrors of his approach to its ill-omened haunts. With a fond hope, therefore, of securing such a companion, he took occasion to remark several times in a loud tone of voice, meant for the information of the company at large, "I'm not for the thrain to-night—I'm goin' to thramp it." But Joe's temper and conversational powers were not of a quality calculated to make the charms of his society an incentive to disagreeable exertion, and nobody

showed any disposition to imitate his frugal example. So he tried the effect of a more particular announcement, and said to his nearest neighbour, "Look-a, Dan, I'm going to thramp it to-night." But Dan only grunted in reply, and Joe perceived that he must make up his mind to a solitary journey.

It was not without considerable heart-sinking that he saw his comrades turn off up the hill to the station, remarking among themselves "what an ould naygur Joe Murphy was, and he wid a couple o' quarts more cockles in his baskit than any of thim had;" while he went on to face the certain ills of a piercing north-wester and the possible perils of a spectral encounter. These last, however, remained purely imaginary, and he experienced nothing worse than bodily discomfort. The bitter blasts hurtled to meet him with many a staggering rebuff; the intermittent rain came down in drenching dashes, so that as he drew near his goal the yellow glare of the lamps was reflected in swimming flags and dancing puddles; but chilled and dripping though he was, he felt himself to be a proud and happy

man as he entered the dirty little baker's shop which he had seen with his mind's eye all the afternoon. His own keen hunger made the smell of the newly baked bread seem very delicious, and as he carefully stowed away two delicately browned, plumply swelling cakes in a corner of his now emptied basket—for he had paid a preliminary visit to a fishmonger—he grinned in a diabolically hideous, satyr-like fashion over the thought of Biddy's delighted surprise.

He then betook himself farther down the lane to a still humbler establishment, where he and others of his trade were in the habit of procuring the materials for their evening meal. Here he was pleased to find that Mrs Kelly, the proprietrix, had reserved for him what is known as a "scrap supper," this being considered an especially profitable investment of twopence for any one who does not object to a slightly heterogeneous combination of ingredients. To-night the big tin bowl, the use of which was included in the bargain, contained one layer of cold pease-pudding, and another of cabbage, which, as

Mrs Kelly was careful to point out, had enjoyed the privilege of being boiled in company with a piece of bacon ; also some odds and ends of sausage and sheep's liver, and half a fried herring, the whole compound being moistened with a greasy broth of undefined antecedents. This, in Joe's opinion, would furnish a positively luxurious repast ; and he started, well content with his purchases, to thread the labyrinth of slums and alleys which lay between him and the back kitchen where he resided. He had spent his last penny—Saturday's " rint " and Sunday's idleness having, as usual, left the arrears to be paid off out of Monday's earnings ; but that circumstance did not diminish his satisfaction, a consciousness of cash in hand being by no means essential to his peace of mind.

He was coming very near his journey's end, when the onset of a peculiarly vehement shower made him uneasy about the safety of his precious cakes. So he paused where the lights of a small public-house flared out a bright circle on the surrounding darkness, and determined that he would transfer the parcel to his pocket—



a most disastrous measure of precaution, as the event proved. For while he was in the very act of hoisting down his basket from his shoulder, a man came reeling out of the tavern and staggered heavily against him, with the result that his basket, being just then poised in a state of unstable equilibrium, swung suddenly sideways with a violent jerk, strewing all its contents upon the sloppy ground. The bowl fell, clanging stridently upon the pavement, whence it rebounded into a deep pool of slush which stretched beside the kerbstone, and there it lay bottom upward, half-submerged. The cakes slipped out of their loose paper wrap, one of them following the bowl into those murky depths, which swallowed it whole with a single "plop," whilst the other went skipping playfully for some distance over the filthy flags, until its career was checked by its collision with an obtruding lamp-post. Never was a stroke of calamity more swiftly dealt. Before Joe well knew what had befallen him, all his cherished hopes had gone, like the wretched Ophelia, to a muddy death.

It would be quite impossible to record in these pages the utterances to which Joe Murphy gave vent as the full realisation of the catastrophe burst upon him. But the worst of it was that neither he nor the tipsy author of the mischief seemed disposed to stop short at mere language, however strong ; and a lively little scuffle was beginning, amid a ring of pleasurable excited onlookers, when the unwelcome arrival of a tall, soldier-like policeman caused a disappointing suspension of hostilities. And now for a few moments it appeared not improbable that Joe's misfortunes might culminate in a night passed at the nearest lock-up. This danger, however, soon blew over. The obvious intoxication of Joe's antagonist rendered him *à priori* an object of suspicion, and Constable 27C was, moreover, sufficiently familiar with the ways and means of those whom he met on that beat to understand how serious a loss, and what ample grounds of provocation, might be represented by that inverted bowl and its ruined contents. So he presently marched off briskly with his erratically moving charge, the crowd

melted away as rapidly as it had gathered, and Joe was left to his own forlorn devices.

It was a miserable scene. The lurid gas gleams shone, through the thick slanting rain-drops, on tall black walls of ruinous, sinister-looking houses, on the miry straits which they bounded, and on—most piteous spectacle of all—the ragged wretch who was half crying over his beggarly loss, as he groped about the streaming pavement, seeking whether any remnant of his goods might perchance have remained uninjured. His own supper was past praying for—engulfed irretrievably in the semi-liquid slush, never again to emerge as food for man or beast. But this afflicted him far less than the thought of the disappointment in store for Biddy, she who was to have fared so sumptuously, and who must now go to bed hungrier than usual, having supped on a mere crust of dry bread. With a faint flutter of hope he picked up the cake which had rolled along the footpath, and anxiously examined into its condition. It had evidently been trodden upon, and was grievously mud-begrimed, but he

imagined that the moisture might possibly not have soaked far into its interior, and with clumsy, cold-benumbed fingers he began to peel off the outer crust, only to find that little, if any, of the dough was in such a state as to be edible by even a most unfastidious feeder. And in grim despair he tossed it with the empty bowl into his basket, and went ruefully on his way; for there was nothing to be gained by longer lingering, and he was already much later than his wont.

But how different a home-coming it was from that to which he had been looking forward all day! Nothing but misery could now await him. He knew well how it would be—how Biddy would storm and scold at him as long as she had any breath left, and then would cough and cough till it seemed as if her gaunt frame must be shaken to pieces. And then the sound of that cough always went to his heart with a sickening pang. This dreary foreknowledge did not quicken his steps, and when he had descended into the long underground passage, almost as filthy as the street,

which contained the door of his apartment, he walked slower and slower, screwing up courage to appear with his unwelcome tidings. The next moment he heard Biddy's thin cracked voice call sharply: "Joe, Joe; is it comin' in to-night you'd be at all, at all, and it goin' on for eight o'clock?" and he felt that he must delay no longer. But when he opened the door, it was upon a sight which made him stand still and gape.

He had expected to find nothing more brilliant than the darkness visible, created by a farthing dip. Yet here was the room all in a glow of light, proceeding, for the most part, from a great turf fire which burned ruddily on the hearth, whilst the atmosphere was pervaded by the unctuous odours of some most savoury cooking. The rickety deal table, drawn up in front of the fire, was covered with eatables—a big loaf, a wedge of cheese, a goodly lump of bacon, a dish of fried potatoes, and, putting the last touch to his incredulous bewilderment, what seemed to him to be dozens of cakes, the exact counterparts of those

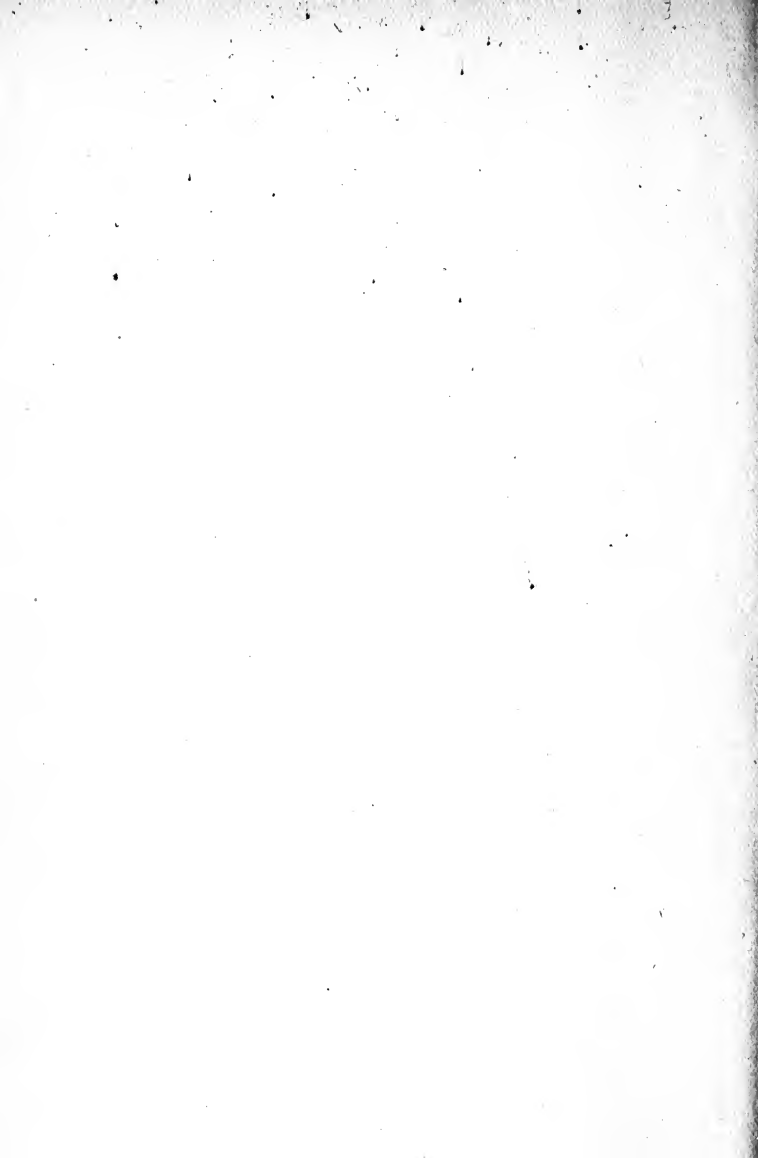
which had been causing him so much perturbation. And there was Biddy sitting comfortably near the warm blaze on their one decrepit chair, and munching busily—indeed, her mouth was so full that she could say nothing intelligible for quite half a minute after his entrance.

If Joe had ever heard of the millennium, he would now certainly have thought that he had walked straight into it. But he never had heard of it, nor did he find his faculties at all equal to the task of accounting for the phenomenon. The heart of the mystery, however, was not far to seek or difficult to pluck out. Pat Murphy, a long-absent member of the family, concerning whose whereabouts and walk in life his brother and sister had dwelt in an ignorance which for certain reasons tended towards the belief that he was sojourning in one of her Majesty's prisons, had suddenly returned from a spell of seafaring, and to-night's extraordinary outbreak of profusion was due to his open-handed prodigality of recently acquired pay.

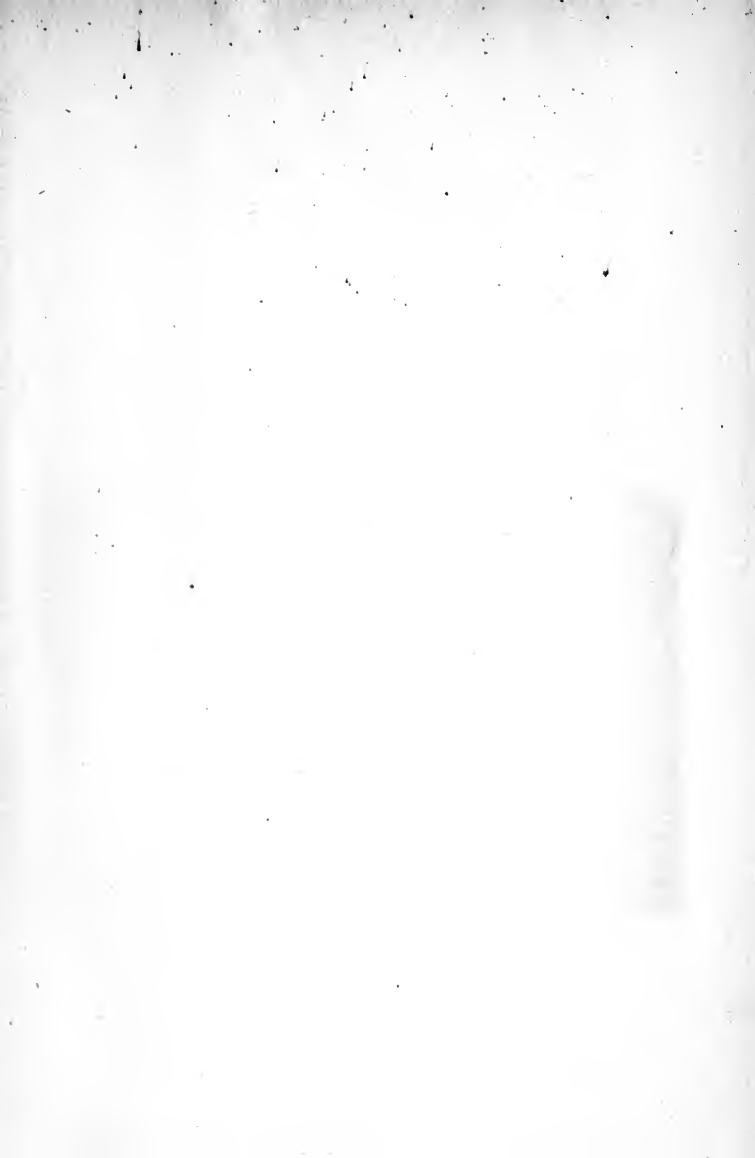
“Well, Joe, and how's yourself?” he said,

now in high good-humour, glancing round at his stupefied brother, but still stooping over the steaming pan in which he was carrying on some culinary operations. "Take a dhrop of porther to put a bit of warmth in ye. These sawsengers'll be done iligant in a couple of minyits."

And here it will be well for us to take our leave of Joe Murphy. We might follow the course of his fortunes for many a long day before we should light on so auspicious a moment. Let us hasten away while the savour of Pat's "sawsengers" still hangs about the warm room, and before the last turf-sod has smouldered from throbbing scarlet embers to ghostly film-white ashes.







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